New: The Interview — see Voices of the Valley, page 13

VALLEY VOICE

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Hanford City Council Votes to Increase Water Rates by 89% Over Four Years

Catherine Doe

The City of Hanford owns its municipal water delivery system.

During its December 15 meeting, the Hanford city council voted 3-2 in favor of raising Hanford's water rates over a period of four years. Mayor Justin Mendes and Councilmembers David Ayers and Russ Curry voted in favor, while Councilmembers Gary Pannett and Francisco Ramirez voted against.

One Hanford resident commenting against the water rate increase during the public hearing. Catherine Doe/Valley Voice

The vote for approval means that water rates will go up by 62% on January 1, 2016. Rates will then increase again by 9% on the beginning of the fiscal year, July 1st. Rates are scheduled to go up again by 9% in July of 2017, and in July of 2018, for a total of 89%.

Deputy Public Works Director, John Doyle, made a presentation demonstrating why such a drastic rate hike was necessary. First, for a myriad of reasons, Hanford has not raised its rates since 2007. Second, the state mandated that Hanford reduce its water use by 28%. While Hanford has only reduced water use by an average of 18%, the reduction in revenue will result in a $93,000 deficit in 2016, and the deficit will get worse every year. Also, the infrastructure needed to pump and deliver water does not get any less expensive just because people reduce their use in water. He also said that if a well went down tomorrow there would not be enough money in the reserves to dig a new one.

Another contributing factor was that Hanford is the only city in California that did not chlorinate its water. The state mandated that the city start when testing came back that their water may be contaminated. Installing a chlorination system cost the city $800,000, and will cost $240,000 a year to implement.

Public Comment during the hearing was unanimously against the increase, except for longtime resident John Zumwalt. He wholeheartedly supported the increase. He said that the City of Tulare--emblematic of just this sort of situation--has ignored its infrastructure for 40 years, and its water system was terrible and completely unreliable.

"I hope you choose to invest in the system," he said to the council.

A public notice was sent out in October and many residents at first thought it was a mistake. Victor Flores said that when he got his notice he thought it was a typo. The general consensus of the speakers was that it is too much--and too fast--for seniors, the unemployed or anyone on a fixed income. It was also pointed out that 19.5% of Hanford residents live beneath the poverty line. Another complaint was that the citizens needed

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Strathmore's new Dollar General store is a busy one with shoppers stopping in to shop on a Saturday afternoon. Nancy Vigran/Valley Voice

Dollar General Stores Fill Needs and Offer Jobs in Rural Communities

Nancy Vigran

All around Tulare County, the yellow buildings of Dollar General stores have been popping up recently. And with good reason--they are profitable here.

But, more importantly to the local residents, they provide a service as well as offer job opportunities, said Michael Washam, assistant director of the county's Economic Development and Planning Resource Management Agency.

For example, it is the initial part of "first development of any new project in Earlimart for decades – since the '50s or '60s," he said.

This type of growth is much needed

DOLLAR GENERAL continued on **4 »**

Federal Transportation Funding Approved for the Next Five Years

The Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) applauds the hard work of the Congressional delegation from the Valley in passing the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), a five-year federal transportation bill.

Throughout this year, TCAG's office worked closely with Congressman Kevin McCarthy (CA-23), to keep him informed of the transportation needs of the Valley, and to evaluate legislative proposals which might affect our work in the San Joaquin Valley.

The FACT Act is the first transportation bill to provide funding for a national freight network. Due to the efforts of the Valley Congressional leaders, SR-99 is a high priority route for the new freight program.

"We would like to express our appreciation to our local elected leaders who listened to our requests and assisted in getting this funding passed. It will allow us to continue to keep moving forward with the much needed road and transportation projects here in Tulare County." - Phil Cox. Chairman TCAG

Parks Advisory Committee Recommends Trap, Neuter, Release Program for Mooney Grove

Catherine Doe

After hearing from the US Department of Fish and Wildlife, Tulare County Animal Control (TCAC) and the Visalia Feral Cat Coalition, the Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) decided to support the Trap Neuter and Release (TNR) Program. The committee, which advises on all 10 Tulare County Parks, met December 8 at the Government Plaza building.

Because the Tulare County Board of Supervisors was unable to resolve the feral cat issue in Mooney Grove, they requested that PAC do their research and come up with a solution. The commission had three options on the table from which to choose on how to handle the feral cats. Option one was TNR. Option two was using existing county policy. Option three was a hybrid of both. The PAC will make their recommendation to the board that TNR be adopted sometime next year, but it is ultimately up to the supervisors to accept the program.

The Visalia Feral Cat Coalition (VFCC) gave a 30-minute presentation during an earlier meeting, so the committee members were already well educated on their program. TNR vaccinates and sterilizes feral cats then returns them to their colony. Cats that are sick or infected with feline leukemia

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Community Benefits as Alta Healthcare District Emerges from Bankruptcy

Dave Adalian

The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 killed a lot of small hospitals.

As its name implies, the law was intended to balance the federal budget by 2002, reducing spending by $160 billion in the process. To achieve its self-imposed fiscal goal, which was forgotten after 9/11, Congress cut $119 billion in health care spending over five years, nearly 10% of it from rural hospitals like those that once dotted the Central Valley. Tiny facilities already struggling to stay afloat, like Dinuba's Alta District Hospital (AHD)and Memorial Hospital at Exeter, took a double blow when Congress slashed Medicare repayments as well. They were doomed.

Dinuba's Hospital Collapses

Memorial, a privately-owned facility, sold itself off to the Kaweah Delta Health Care District, and some services are still available on its former campus. Alta and the people it served weren't as lucky,

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FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

In The Old Days, Procrastination Was Much Easier

My computer crashed.

Years ago I had a good friend who once said she was prevented from doing a batch of writing because she didn't have an adequate computer (She may even, heaven help me, have used the term "word processor.") on which to do the job.I remember having felt some lament that she was hors de combat, but also a measure of scorn for allowing herself to be sidelined. In those far off days—in fact, until this paper's rebirth in 2013—I was a typewriter guy. By which I mean manual.

I was—perhaps I more properly should say remain--a champion procrastinator. I am, in fact, writing this column at what amounts to the last minute.

But in the old days--at university, say—procrastination was much easier, especially when it came to writing. Until two and a half years ago, all I ever neededto do was roll paper into any manual machine and start typing. Rough drafts were for suckers. I was never very fast, but rarely did I make a mistake. No typos or errors in composition; I would always write,steadily,straight out from my head to the page. It was simple. And at university every paper I ever wrote was the result of an all-nighter.

Here's the thing: Unless it was manufactured around the turn of the 20th century—or maybe a proto-type of some kind—a manual typewriter is easy to use. There could, admittedly, be the occasional ink ribbon issue—but once that was mastered I was, as the phrase goes, home and dry.

So I failed in any meaningful way to understand the plight of my computer-less friend.

Until now.

I'm writing this on a borrowed computer. With Windows 10, no less. It's a far cry from simple. But at least it demonstrates how comfortable I've become with my own computer, and Windows 8—which, as I've written earlier, seemed a quantum leap from Windows 7. So I apologize in advance for any irregularities in the 17 December edition, even while ascribing them to this blip. Everything you read in the Valley Voice eventually passes through my now beleaguered computer. In fact, the paper's layout is accomplished on it.

Our tech wizard, Tony, said that something was mightily taxing the hard drive. He could not tell what it was, exactly, but he did take measures to rectify it. These all failed. So he restored the computer to a date from before the malfunction. Three times. This, too, proved futile. What we had to do, he finally declared, was wipe it to factory.

This kind of thing does not happen with a manual typewriter.

But it has happened before on my computer. The very first time it went awry, early in my tenure as editor, I was outraged—and became resolute in my determination to fix it. Somehow, I found a way to—magically, it seemed—re-set the entire construct to a previous date. And it worked. I was able to resume as if nothing untoward had happened. When my computer again went south, about a year later, I relied on all my powers of recollection to re-set it as I had done before. I was, sadly, inadequate to the task. After an heroic struggle, I finally positioned the computer to the point where I could Ghost-of-Christmas-Past it. Only I went too far. Way too far. I must have been flushed with the success of my memory, because—inadvertently—I wiped it to factory. To the day I bought it.

Still, I was pleased with myself—until I rebooted it: Nothing. I had killed the whole paper.

This kind of thing does not happen with a manual typewriter.

OK, nothing—apart from typing—happens with a manual typewriter. It's just a hunk of metal, and anything that does take place happens in an author's head. The computer, it seems, has a mind of its own.

And it would be impossible to produce the paper without it. It truly is staggering to reflect that, with email alone, we can collect articles and—after editing and layout—send the whole enchilada in such a fashion that the printer, in Fowler, can turn the files into a tangible newspaper.

So I'm grateful to have it. I'm grateful for working with Tony, our tech wizard, and Nancy—whose computer I'm writing this on. I'm grateful for working with my wife. The newspaper couldn't really be accomplished without these three. It would, indeed, get done—it just wouldn't be nearly the same.

But I must admit that I miss my old typewriter.

— Joseph Oldenbourg

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Political Fix

Catherine Doe

Hair on Fire

The *Visalia Times-Delta* printed an op-ed on December 10 written by Tulare County Supervisor Phil Cox that set Visalia's staff and city council's hair on fire. Mayor Steve Nelsen said, "I take exception to his op-ed," which was one of the more tame comments.

The lingering message Mr. Cox wanted the reader to hear was that Visalia hasn't learned the "secrets to maintaining a good financial state," which is, "you spend less than you earn." Mr. Cox said in his commentary, "Not a week goes by without a local citizen asking me how the County of Tulare maintains its strong financial position while the City of Visalia sends the message to its residents that it is struggling."

Can you say, "condescending?"

I don't know what city Mr. Cox is talking about, but I attend a majority of the city council meetings and I've never heard that Visalia is struggling. Sure, Mayor Nelsen can be very cautious about incurring on-going expenses, and it can be difficult to squeeze a nickel out of Councilman Greg Collins, but the city sends the message that things are going great.

Mayor Nelsen said that, in fact, Visalia is not struggling.

"During the recession we did not lay off one person nor did we reduce any city programs. It amazes me that someone who represents Visalia on the Tulare County Board of Supervisors would say something like that."

Council Member Amy Shuklian added that the city has an A+ credit rating from Standard and Poor. "I think that a city that is struggling does not receive an A+ credit rating. How can the city and county have a spirit of collaboration when he spews uncorroborated statements?"

I wondered how a former Visalia City Councilman such as Mr. Cox could have such a lack of understanding of his own town's finances.

Then, maybe he knows more than we give him credit. Reading between the lines, one can see that his commentary is an obvious political jab at Visalia City Councilwoman, Amy Shuklian, who is running against him for Tulare County Supervisor District 3. She said, "I think he sees his job is on the line. It's the season for this type of behavior, and I don't mean the Holiday season, I mean it's election season."

Councilwoman Shuklian pointed out that this is a perfect example of why she is running for supervisor. She has been saying from the beginning of her campaign that there needs to be more collaboration and consensus between the Board of Supervisors and the city, not backstabbing. She explained that she is sure that the county is on firm financial standing just like Visalia. But she pointed out that eight cities contribute to the county's coffers with the county getting a piece of each city's sales and property tax.

"So when the cities prosper the county prospers and Visalia is their biggest contributor." She continued, "So why would you want to knock the city that you represent and contributes the most to your budget? It's a sign of his attitude and arrogance."

Mayor Nelsen wanted to point out that if Tulare County were doing so great financially then why did the Board of Supervisors wait seven years to drill a new well in Mooney Grove? The old well stopped working around 2008 and Mr. Cox, whose district includes Mooney Grove, basically allowed all those valley oaks and redwood trees to die.

The SEIU workers also have wondered, if the county is doing so well, then why do some of their employees not make enough money to buy groceries at the end of the month or even have five dollars to cover the co-pay to see a doctor? In the September 4, 2014 issue of the *Valley Voice,* we printed a copy of the pay stub of a county employee that showed she had$103.78 to live on, after paying rent, and was on the verge of having her electricity turned off.

Despite Mr. Cox' lack of leadership in some areas, I don't think Ms. Shuklian can beat an incumbent, and have told her so. But she hardly ever listens to me and her ardent supporters disagree with my prediction--though I have to say my last election predictions were 98% on the money. Still, she may be right. The average Joe may never see Mr. Cox' editorial, but Visalians who read the newspaper are voters and do not appreciate their city being thrown under the bus.

That son-of-a-bitch

Talk about hair on fire — Bob Ramos, regular commenter at Hanford's City council meetings, called the editor of the *Valley Voice* and chewed his ear off for 20 minutes. Mr. Ramos took offense that we printed a quote "son-of-a bitch" in reference to him. Mr. Ramos complained by saying that neither myself, nor the editor, knew his mother and that we just lost a reader.

The *Valley Voice* would never use that term — but Dave Thomas, a former Hanford City Council member, is a private citizen and he did call Bob Ramos a son-of-a-bitch. Mr. Thomas was shocked that Mr. Ramos would tell a boldface lie to the city council and then implicate him. The interaction between Mr. Ramos and Mr. Thomas was an integral part of the process Hanford went through choosing a new mayor and vice-mayor. So we printed it.

Now Mr. Ramos has even more to be mad about. He has a major bone to pick with Councilmember Francisco Ramirez and now, not only was Mr. Ramirez elected vice-mayor despite Mr. Ramos' efforts to derail him, but Mr. Ramirez received a prestigious award three days later honoring top young professionals.

Mr. Ramirez was named by the Business Street Online as one of the "40 under 40." The online newspaper is a business daily publication that covers Central California. Every year they recognize local outstanding business professionals who have demonstrated a strong work ethic and leadership abilities in the private and public sectors who are under 40 years old. They had a reception and party to honor all the winners on December 3 at Chukchansi Park.

It was reported that Mr. Ramos did not attend.

Assemblyman Devon Mathis Makes it Official

California Assemblyman Devon Mathis announced during a press conference at the Visalia Veterans Memorialon December 4 that he is going to seek re-election. He made it clear when first electedthat he plans on serving six terms in the assembly, until he terms out in 2026. At the press conference, Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward, Tulare County Supervisor Phil Cox and Visalia Mayor Steve Nelsen were in attendance and gave their endorsements to Mr. Mathis.

When asked about his endorsements, Mr. Mathis said: "I don't have the endorsements if I didn't do the job."

In light of this statement, I look forward to Mr. Mathis' gainingmany endorsements from local leaderswho will notneed his return endorsement like these three will when they face reelection.

As a Republican getting the job done, I also expect him to get the endorsement of at least one our local congressmen, such as Rep. David Valadao or Rep Devin Nunes. It is true that both congressmen endorsed Rudy Mendoza in the last election, but so did Mr. Ward, Mr. Nelsen and Mr. Cox.

Someone who has experience running for elected office in Tulare County said, "I did see that he is being un-enthusiastically endorsed by some elected officials. It will be interesting as Devon truly does not have a base yet. He started as an unknown as I haven't seen any development in him building a base other that the title he holds. I still think a well

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Dollar General

Continued from p. 1

in the rural communities, Washam said. It provides a market with various forms of staples and items that each community needs. It also provides jobs. For each Dollar General store, some 13 or so part and full time jobs are created in some communities that have had no local form of employment opportunity prior.

In all, there are now nine Dollar General stores in Tulare County, including a brand new location in Tipton.

One is being built in Springville, and one is moving forward in Pixley. The company is investigating a location in the Cutler-Orosi area. And, there is also a Dollar General in Corcoran.

While fairly new to Tulare and Kings counties, and California as well, the Dollar General corporation has been around for 75 years with 12,000 stores in 43 states. Its headquarters is located in Gooldettsville, Tennessee.

Some of the Tulare County locations are in cities such as Visalia, Tulare, Exeter and Woodlake.

But the company has found the best sales are in the unincorporated areas, Washam said.

On an early Saturday afternoon in Strathmore, cars, bicycles and pedestrians were streaming in and out of the store located on Avenue 196. Some were leaving with a small bag and others with baskets full.

"It's good (to have a local store)," said Darla Oakley. Oakley's family lives in Lindsay, but her daughter attends Strathmore High School.

"There are no other stores in the area with such a variety of items," she said, "and we are here at least a couple times a week."

While the store provides a lot of staples including some groceries and school supplies, it is also a place to do a little specialty shopping, Oakley said. She gave an example of her daughter's needing a Secret Santa gift, which they purchased there.

Likewise, the Earlimart store is very busy, Washam said.

"I recently went into the one in Earlimart when there were only one or two cars in the parking lot," he said, "but the store was packed."

Residents do not need to use up gas, or drive far to get a lot of the products they need, he added. And, many families may only have one car which is used for someone to get to work. So, other family members are able to walk to the store.

At first, management for the store chain was hesitant about building new stores in the rural communities, Washam said.

It has specific guidelines in which its staff looks at possible locations, such as a minimum population of 3,000.

"They know what they are looking for," he said, "Earlimart was kind of hard to get in."

But Washam and developers for Earlimart's White River Plaza were persistent, and the benefits are great for that as well as other rural communities and the store chain itself.

The Earlimart store is not only convenient for Earlimart residents, but also for those living in Alpaugh, Richgrove and Allensworth, Washam said.

"It has beat all sales' expectations," he said.

Auto Zone has also come to the Earlimart development and on Wednesday it was announced with a ground-breaking ceremony that a McDonald's is being built, with plans to open in roughly 90 days.

Political Fix

Continued from p. 3

known Republican can take him."

It is unclear if a slate of endorsements will even be necessary though. According to the *Visalia Times-Delta,* "Mathis said he was unaware if any other candidates have already declared for the seat."

I found that, in fact, someone has declared his candidacy for the 26th Assembly District, a 23-year-old Republican from Porterville, who, according to the Tulare County Registrar of Voters, has never voted in an election. His name is Alexzander Acevedo and he has a 2016 campaign Facebook page with three "likes" and has filed his preliminary paperwork. It is too early to officially declare, but he filed back in September his form 510, intention to run, and his 410 to form a committee so he can start fundraising. During a phone conversation he said that he has a good chance of winning and "wants to put Tulare County on the map."

Why Mr. Mathis' campaign team did not revealAlexzander with a Zcould be one of two things. Either they are incompetent, or Mr. Acevedo is a plant to split the Hispanic vote in case a certain someone, who got slammed in the last election, decides to run again.

As I see it, Mr. Mathis' seat is vulnerable. He had virtually no legislative success except one bill on illegal dumping. Healso lost his entire staff, either by firing or quitting, in less than a year. Only one inexperienced office worker is left out of his original team. He has a paltry $47,000 in his war chest and has hired a campaign manager who doesn't know the first thing about Tulare County. She also happens to be the Chief of Staff's wife from Walnut Grove. This neither shows good leadership nor cooperation, two traits he extolled during his last campaign.

Is my assessment accurate? I don't know but I would like to get some feedback from Matt Shupe, Mr. Mathis' Communications Director. But communications do not seem to be his strong point. I am still waiting for his response to anotherone of my articlesreporting that Mr. Mathis threw his hat in the ring to be the Republican minority leader. Mr. Shupe categorically denied that Mr. Mathis considered running for this position. In the meantime, all we can do is wait for Mr. Acevedo to decide to start campaigning, the Democrats to field a candidate, and for Mr. Shupe to return my emails. Fortunately, I am a very patient person.

Little Miss Grows Up

With four much older siblings, all too willing to show my daughter Mercedes the facts of life, no one could say that my youngest was sheltered. But she always invoked a sense of innocence and trust in others. She still does, despite what she has been through.

Mercedes had a pretty happy childhood filled with birthday parties, lots of friends and family get-togethers. Things started falling apart the beginning of her freshman year of high school. During the last two years she watched me almost burn down the kitchen after I spent an afternoon on the phone trying to pry out of the hospital staff if my son was alive. She had to hear the sickening sound of a stranger's car horn in our driveway, with the horn blower there to serve us legal notices, always at night, sometimes on holidays, letting us know her grandparents were suing us. She had to listen to her older sister cry over the phone as I tried to calm her down a few days before her operation because my mom had just hung up on her. Worst of all, she had to remove all her drawings and posters from her bedroom walls, give away her stuffed animals, and pack the things she could in card board boxes, because her grandparents were evicting her from the only home she had ever known.

There is actually more but I think you get the picture. You might have thought that, as a result, a moody teenager would act out and become one of the trouble kids. She decided to do the opposite.

As a junior at Exeter Union High School, she is one of the most beautiful girls there but does not act like it. She takes honor classes, is college bound, and always has good grades. Now, at 16 years old, she has her driver's license and a job. She just bought herself her first iPhone. Her accomplishments though are not my main source of joy. I love to hear her laugh in her room when talking with friends. I love to hear her sing in the car to the loop of Christmas Carols played on 98.9. I love taking her to the gym (she now insists on driving me) and watch her act like she is dying after doing 30 sit-ups. We go hiking, traveling and shopping and I love hearing her talk about her life and boys.

One day recently she looked at me and said, "I'm going to save this family." She said she was going to marry someone with awesome parents and siblings and the in-laws and our family would have great times together. She said holidays would go back to what they used to be when the grandchildren, parents and grandparents all celebrated around the table together then stayed up late to play games.

This Christmas season, I was faced with decorating a house that was not my home, and contemplated buying presents after having to give away three-fourths of our belongings. Still, the decorations in our rental home ended up looking pretty festive, and I picked out some amazing gifts. But more importantly about this Christmas season is that my kids survived the last two years and the family is closer and stronger than ever.

I sometimes kid and tell people that we were "kicked off the island." But then I looked around our dinner table and realized that we are the island. I have five awesome kids, who are my parent's only grandchildren, and they are the future of this family.

And when Mercedes says she is going to save us, I believe her, but we no longer need saving. Just like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, because we weathered the storm together, we were always home. The only thing that changed is that my Little Miss grew up.

HEAT Wins Second Round Against the City of Hanford

Catherine Doe

In the Kings County Superior Court, the Hanford Environmental Awareness Team (HEAT) racked up another win against the city concerning the Bajun American Properties housing development.

HEAT's attorney, Richard Harriman, and HEAT member Robin Mattos were in attendance December 15 to hear Judge La Porte rule that City of Hanford was wrong when it did not accept HEAT's appeal. Mattos claims she physically delivered the document and check, and the $1,000 fee to city hall within the required time frame but Darlene Mata, Community Development director, refused to accept it on the advice of Hanford's lawyer Tim Mizote.

HEAT won its first case against the city on September 22 when the city failed to strike the case.

In the court's tentative ruling it wrote, "The court finds that on the face of the pleadings, city staff abused its discretion in refusing to accept the appeal filed by petitioner on 6/12/15. The city agreed in its MOU that it would email notices to HEAT and to HEAT's counsel. The city had every right to also give notice by certified mail, return receipt, but since email notice was agreed to by the parties, it was an abuse of discretion not to forward the documents by email, so that petitioners would have the full 10 days in which to prepare the appeal. The appeal tendered June 12, 2015 was filed within 10 days of service of notice and within 10 days of the signature on the Notice of Determination and the filing of the documents with the County Clerk. On the face of the pleadings, it was an abuse of discretion not to accept the appeal."

The MOU in which the court referred, or Memorandum of Understanding, was worked out between HEAT and the city in 2007 to ensure that the city keep the environmental group informed of any proposed development over five acres in the Centennial Drive and Millennium Way region. The goal of HEAT is to make Hanford a walkable and bikable city and save what is left of Mussel Slough.

The case concerns a two-story, 216-unit complex on the corner of Centennial Drive and Millennium Way. The empty land is zoned as medium density residential. Back in June, city staff decided that "the proposed project will not have a significant effect on the environment since the project is to be located in an already urbanized area."

The apartment complex is within a half mile of Lowe's and is zoned as residential. But it is also surrounded by vacant land and sits on the banks of Mussel Slough. The proposed future housing complex will sit where a section of Mussel Slough was legally lost when Paynter Realty and Investments were building the Lowe's shopping center.

It is HEAT's position that an EIR must be done before building is to start on the Bajun American Properties housing complex. A letter from Harriman was sent to remind Darlene Mata, Hanford Community Development director when the development was first approved, that not completing a focused EIR is in violation of the MOU signed between the city and HEAT in 2007. The MOU stated that not only should HEAT have been notified that a site review plan application had been submitted, which it was not, but that any development inside the litigated area must go through the EIR process.

Harriman said that now the city has to explain why they did not let HEAT file their appeal. The hearing where the city will be stating their case will be February 11, 2016.

Visalia City Council Approves Walmart Supercenter

Catherine Doe

After a six-year process, the Visalia Walmart on Noble Avenue is only one step away from becoming a newsupercenter. The Visalia City Council voted December 6 to approve the final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the Conditional Use Permit(CUP)for the Walmart expansion.According to Andrew Chamberlain, Visalia city planner, this is the longest permitting process he has been through since working for the city.

In approving the CUP, the city council is looking forward to the over 20-year-old store getting a complete remodel andnew façade. The existing Walmart, located at 1819 East Noble Avenue, will be expanded from 133,206 square feet up to 190,000 square feet. With the expansion and larger parking lot, several derelict buildings will also be demolished.

The supercenter will add a grocery store to its retail section and be open 24 hours a day. Right now Walmart is open from 6am to 11pm. The improved facility will also have an outdoor garden center and possibly a new fast food tenant. The expansion will go north toward Noble and East towards South Pinkham Street.

According to Gail Zurek, president of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, the supercenter will increase Visalia's tax base and provide new jobs.

During the public hearing all speakers were in favor of the expansion. Marilyn Kinoshita, the Tulare County agriculture commissioner, a pastor from a local church and Zurek related how Walmart is a good neighbor and generously donates to local charitable organizations. Visalia Mayor Nelsen agreed, applaudingWalmart for staying the course even through the many appeals causing years of delays.

Linda Sambrano also spoke during the hearing. She lives behind Walmart's north wall and has been involved with the proposed expansion since 2009 when the company first approached their neighbors. Her neighborhood's concern is the increase in crime and homeless population that a huge retailer and parking lot attracts. Walmart's back wall is currently only six feet high, which is short enough for shoplifters to jump over to get away from the police. She said this has happened several times and she has incurred damages to her backyard and gate.

After the meeting,Sambrano said that she was very happy with the city council's decision to raise the wall to eight feet. She said that she was also very impressed with how well the council members listened, and took into consideration, her request to make the back wall 10 feet high, even though it was not feasible. The engineer said that they could raise the wall to eight feet without much modification but to go 10 feet would mean they would have to get into everyone's backyard and construct bracing for the increased weight.

A Long Road

Walmart's final step before being able to start constructionis going back to court to lift the writ of mandate.This was imposed when a San Francisco law firm, M.R. Wolfe and Associates, challenged the first EIR as violating the state's environmental standards, in particular air quality.The Visalia Planning Commission first approved the site plan in April, 2011. M.R. Wolfe and Associates appealed the next month.

In its appeal, the law firm claimed that the project would unreasonably worsen the air quality in the surrounding area. The law firm represented the Visalia Smart Growth Coalition,made up of a couple of concerned residents, but mainly local grocers who did not want to see Walmart expand into selling groceries. Even though the law firm continued to file appeals and send letters asking for postponements of council meetings, no one from the coalition or law firm has showed up to a council meeting since 2011.

M.R. Wolfe and Associatesalso representedthe Hanford Clean Air Coalition in challenging a retail building complex near the southwest corner of 12th Avenue and Lacey Boulevard. According to Darrel Pyle, Hanford city manager, he has never seen a member of the Hanford Clean Air Coalition and suspects they may be the similar to the Visalia group.

A big box retailer is already committed to the development and the "group" might be another big box chain that doesn't want competition. Wolfe and Associates has also opposed a proposed a WinCo Foods Store in Vallejo using the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to slow the process. The Hanford development will not go through what happened in Visalia, however, as the appeal has been withdrawn and the development can proceed with construction.

Councilmember Greg Collins lamented the design of the entire shopping district along Noble, including Save Mart. If M.R. Wolfe and Associates really cared about the air quality, they would have protested the development's design. As it is now, there is only one way in and out of Walmart and you can't walk, bicycle or even drive from Save Mart to Walmart. One has to get into their car, get on Noble, and idle at two stoplights before turning into the Walmart parking,where more idling normally occurs.

"It's frustrating to me as a city planner. The design is crappy" said Collins. He also said that law firms used CEQA not to improve the environment but to intentionally stall the permitting process.

Council member Warren Gubler concurred. "I am concerned how long this took and how CEQA is being used as a club."

The council vote was 5-0 to approve the project.

Agriculture

Farms Sell Christmas Trees, Holiday Tradition

Steve Adler, CFBF

The holiday season is something special for Emily Jacob Amy of Davis, whose family has been operating a choose-and-cut Christmas tree farm for nearly 60 years.

"It's more than just selecting a tree to the families that come to our farm," she said. "Our customer is coming for a tradition they have been following. They like the low-key atmosphere, away from the hustle and bustle of the shopping center, enjoying a walk in the fresh air and the smell of the fresh-cut tree."

Amy, who operates Jacob Mini Farm with her brother, Charles Jacob, and husband, Fred Mitchell, said the 6-acre farm grows several varieties of trees: Douglas fir, incense cedar, Scotch pine and giant Sequoia.

"All of our trees are $38, no matter what the size or species. This encourages the larger trees to be cut," she said. "If too many small trees are cut, it reduces available trees for the next couple of years."

Prices are the same as a year ago, Amy said, noting that she tries to hold the price steady as much as possible.

"Costs for insurance and electricity to run the pump are the biggest expenses, along with property taxes," she said. "As the expenses go up, so must the price of the trees."

The continuing drought has caused a few setbacks at the farm, Amy said, noting that it cut back 50 percent on irrigation this year, following a 40 percent cut in 2014.

"This year we lost more trees than ever before. This year is going to be a tough year; we will likely have more people walk away not finding what they are looking for," she said.

The executive director of the California Christmas Tree Association, Sam Minturn, said the drought has caused the loss of some young trees at farms around the state, but there hasn't been a significant impact on more mature trees.

According to the National Christmas Tree Association, harvest-height trees have well-established root systems, so they're not as susceptible to seasonal weather patterns as younger trees.

"It does not require thousands of gallons of water to grow a Christmas tree, as has recently been quoted," said Rick Dungey of the NCTA. "Only about 4 percent of all Christmas tree farms in the U.S. use irrigation. You do not need to consider the impact of a regional drought in deciding to display a fresh, farm-grown Christmas tree."

There are other benefits of real trees, according to Ginger Armstrong, CCTA president.

"Unlike artificial Christmas trees, real trees are renewable and recyclable," Armstrong said. "However, many people still perceive cutting trees down as bad for the environment, and that's not the case."

Three-year-old Chenchen Wang of Davis enjoys a holiday outing at Jacob Mini Farm, a Christmas tree farm in Davis that has been in operation for more than half a century. Steve Adler/CFBF

During the four to six years or more it takes a Christmas tree to mature, the trees provide a number of benefits to the environment, she said, noting that Christmas trees produce oxygen as they grow and serve as filtering devices for dust and smog. As trees develop, needles are shed naturally and the surrounding soil is enhanced. The trees also become home to birds and small animals, and serve as winter habitats for deer and other wildlife.

"Christmas trees are like other crops. They are meant to be harvested, just like corn or vegetables," Armstrong said. "Since trees are a crop, they are managed on a sustainable basis."

In times past, Christmas trees were often cut down in forests and not replaced with seedlings. But today, nearly all Christmas trees, 98 percent, are grown on farms. According to the CCTA, for every Christmas tree harvested, two or three more are planted.

At Jacob Mini Farm, Amy said no trees are killed. Customers who come to the farm are asked to leave a whorl of four or five good-sized branches on the stump below the cut. These branches will turn up naturally, become vertical and form a new tree, she said.

"We do not shear our trees; it is like you would find a tree growing in the forest. Our customers enjoy walking through the 'forest' of trees to find the one that is calling their name," she said.

"Real trees have a pleasant holiday smell, especially after trimming the tree," Amy added. "It is actually the sap that provides the scent. As you decorate, the needles bend or break, exposing the sap to the air, and that is what you smell."

As do many small farmers, Amy and her husband have other jobs to support them. Amy said it is a good year on the farm when the sale of trees pays operating expenses and yearly property taxes.

"I have a full-time job, so this is usually a weekend project. The small farm does not support the household," she said.

Nationally, more than 33 million fresh-cut trees are purchased, with a total price tag of $1.2 billion.

In California, despite the drought and competition both from artificial trees and from fresh-cut trees shipped in from the Northwest, the state's 300-plus Christmas tree farms are enjoying a brisk business, Minturn said.

For more information about California Christmas tree farms, visit www.cachristmas.com.

(Steve Adler is associate editor of Ag Alert. He may be contacted at sadler@cfbf.com.)

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New CFBF Policy Reflects Changes in Use of Drones

Ching Lee, CFBF

The use of drones and other aerial technology dominated discussions by delegates to the California Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting, as they developed new policy to deal with potential impacts of aircraft on agriculture.

Delegates representing county Farm Bureaus throughout the state also tackled issues ranging from honeybees to taxation to crop insurance during the 97th CFBF Annual Meeting in Reno last week. The policies they set each year guide future work of Farm Bureau leadership and staff.

DRONES continued on **7** »

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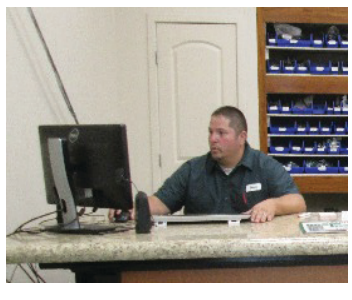

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Agriculture

Drones

Continued from p. 6

Concerns about how aircraft could disrupt livestock production and could be used for surveillance led CFBF delegates to adopt two separate policies—one specifically to address manned aircraft and the other one for unmanned aircraft systems, or UAS.

Although farmers see potential applications for aerial technology in farming, they say there may be unintended negative ramifications associated with its use.

Livestock ranchers say potential problems exist for all low-flying aircraft, including helicopters, drones and hot-air balloons. They cited incidents of aircraft disturbing livestock and causing them to stampede, resulting in injury and production losses.

Photo courtesy Southeast Missouri State University

The new CFBF policies make clear that aircraft—both manned and unmanned—should not fly so close to livestock, poultry or other animal operations that animals or production would be adversely affected.

Both policies support requiring all operators of manned or unmanned aircraft, including government agencies and third parties, to obtain written consent from landowners and farmers prior to the use of aircraft over their property.

Delegates adopted additional policy language for unmanned aircraft systems to support: their use for agricultural purposes; allowing landlords and tenants to fly such aircraft over their fields without it being considered commercial activity; the Federal Aviation Administration developing reasonable certification and safety training requirements for the operation of unmanned aircraft; and using safety features to notify manned aircraft that an unmanned aircraft is in the vicinity.

Furthermore, the policy opposes FAA regulations that require a pilot's license and third-class medical certification to operate an unmanned aircraft.

Although delegates adopted two policies in order to distinguish aircraft flown by on-board pilots and aircraft flown by remote pilots on the ground, Madera County rancher Clay Daulton, who is also a pilot, said there is not much difference between the two types of aircraft with regard to potential impacts to agriculture.

"Unauthorized crop data acquisition is unauthorized data, period; it doesn't make a whit of difference how it's collected," he said. "Unauthorized animal harassment is just that, pilot or no on-board pilot."

One distinction he makes is that pilotless aircraft lack the incentive for the operator's self-preservation, allowing a greater chance for people on the ground or in the air to get hurt when such an aircraft crashes. It's a safety issue he said the FAA needs to resolve in the near term, and one for which the American Farm Bureau Federation should provide input as it relates to the safety and productivity of people and animals.

Josh Rolph, CFBF Federal Policy manager, said the organization hadn't had specific policy on unmanned aircraft before Farm Bureau delegates acted last week.

"This will give CFBF staff more direction on how to best represent Farm Bureau on an increasingly important issue," Rolph said.

In other policy matters, CFBF delegates added to existing policy on bee protection to support development and implementation of best-management practices to protect the health and pollination activities of bees.

Also related to bees, concerns about the rise in bee colony thefts led the delegates to amend CFBF policy on rural crime, clarifying that the theft of agricultural property underscores the need for stricter laws, increased enforcement and prosecution to the full extent of the law.

An attempt by the California Legislature last year to amend the state Constitution to lower the vote threshold for local sales and use or transaction and use taxes to fund local transportation projects inspired new language in CFBF policy on government finance.

The added statement says Farm Bureau opposes any legislation or election that would increase local sales and use or transaction and use taxes for specific purposes unless approved by a two-thirds vote of the electorate.

Concerned about potential funding cuts to crop insurance programs for rice farmers, delegates adopted policy in support of the original crop insurance funding levels in the 2014 Farm Bill.

Among other actions, Farm Bureau delegates made policy changes to support:

- Development and/or expansion of commercial markets for all agricultural biomass, not just agricultural waste biomass.
- A milk pricing system that responds quickly to fluctuations in production costs and other factors.
- Advertising of domestic wine and related products; the previous policy limited support of advertising to radio and television and was written before the advent of social media.

(Ching Lee is an assistant editor of Ag Alert. She may be contacted at clee@cfbf.com.)

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Commentary: California is No Australia, But Lessons Can Be Learned

Paul Wenger, CFBF

As California endures its fourth year of drought, significant attention has been given to comparisons with Australia, which was forced to extreme measures in dealing with its "Millennium Drought" between 1995 and 2008. A recent study group of legislators and representatives of labor, environmental and business organizations participated in a tour of Australia coordinated by the California Foundation on the Environment and the Economy. I was asked to join the group in order to provide an agricultural perspective about the drastic measures Australia undertook to respond to its 13-year drought, and potential implications for California.

First, let me set a little perspective between California and Australia. Australia basically encompasses the same land mass as our 48 contiguous states, is the driest inhabited continent in the world and has a total population of 23 million people. California's 39 million residents live in a state punctuated by a diversity of geography that runs the gamut from deserts in the south to the very wet North Coast. Our entire state is smaller than the Murray-Darling Basin, Australia's "Central Valley."

Australia's agricultural production as measured at the farm gate totals about $38 billion, compared to California's $54 billion annually, and includes a fraction of the 300 crops grown in our Central Valley alone. For its fresh water, Australia relies mainly on rain capture, which can be very heavy but sporadic. Australia receives little water from snow melt and has limited groundwater.

When faced with the realities of a sustained drought and a water infrastructure insufficient to adequately meet its needs, Australia undertook significant actions to align its water supply with core demand. To do this, the nation invested in infrastructure. It spent $6 billion on increased water storage, desalination and water recycling, and in conveyance systems to move water efficiently.

Australia also spent $4 billion to purchase water "licenses"—water rights, in our terms—from those who historically held them: farmers. A water license was defined as the amount of water a grower was entitled to from surface and/or groundwater. The government of Australia purchased water licenses from farmers, many of whom were financially ravaged from the extended drought. The result: A significant amount of previously irrigated land will be forever fallowed.

While I was in Australia, I met with agricultural leaders to get their

AUSTRALIA continued on **8 »**

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Agriculture

Water Reporting Rules Will Take Effect on January 1

Paul Wenger, CFBF

Expanded requirements for measuring and reporting water diversions—as small as 10 acre-feet—have farmers and ranchers bracing for added costs and complexities.

Senate Bill 88, passed in June, adds water measurement and reporting requirements that become effective on Jan. 1.

The State Water Resources Control Board said it intends to adopt an emergency regulation to meet the legislative deadline at its second meeting in January. The water board has held a series of regional public meetings, with a workshop set for Dec. 17 in Sacramento.

Among the many uncertainties about the emergency regulation are how much statewide implementation will cost and what will be done with data from hourly monitoring of water diversions, said Danny Merkley, California Farm Bureau Federation water resources director.

The SB 88 requirement will apply to about 12,000 water right holders statewide.

During the 2015 drought, the water board said, it called for water users to provide predictions of expected surface water diversions, and report back on actual use. The board said the information received from water diverters "showed the historic reporting standard does not provide accurate or timely water demand data sufficient for drought response."

SB 88 authorizes the water board to adopt an initial, emergency regulation that will be in effect until the board finalizes a permanent one.

The emergency regulation calls for measurement devices or methods that "must be capable of continuous measuring of water diversion rates and quantity—and permitees must maintain a record of all diversion, including date, time and in intervals of one hour or less."

No equipment specifications or operation requirements have been set.

"These requirements would apply to all years, not just drought years, although they're being introduced in the context of an emergency due to the drought," Merkley said.

In a letter to the water board, the Shasta County Farm Bureau said SB 88 was "pushed through the Legislature without benefit of the normal legislative hearing process as an emergency measure."

Although the bill was signed by the governor in June, public workshops weren't held until the first week in November, just weeks before the Jan. 1 effective date of the emergency regulation.

"The prolonged lag time between the authorizing legislation and notice to the public is unacceptable and leaves those regulated in an impossible compliance position," the county Farm Bureau said.

Farm Bureau actively opposed these and other provisions in SB 88 at the time it was voted on by the Legislature and continues to find the proposed regulation problematic, Merkley added.

The water board has the authority to exercise discretion under SB 88, to modify the requirements if strict compliance is infeasible, is unreasonably expensive, would unreasonably affect public trust uses, or would result in the waste or unreasonable use of water, he said.

Merkley said the water board could increase the 10 acre-foot reporting threshold to 25 acre-feet or more if the benefits of additional information are substantially outweighed by the cost of installing measuring devices.

After a November public meeting in Redding, the Shasta County Cattlemen's Association wrote to the water board saying it believes SB 88 "is unworkable and one of the worst pieces of legislation regarding water rights and diversions we have ever seen."

The cattle ranchers said their concerns include a one-size-fits-all regulatory approach that lumps those diverting very small amounts of water in with the state's largest diverters.

Working with the University of California Cooperative Extension on water measurement technology, the county cattlemen's association said it found some equipment failure and cumbersome data management, noting "downloading and summarizing transducer data to meet the (proposed) monthly reporting requirement is a herculean task."

The Dec. 17 public workshop will take place at 9 a.m. at the CalEPA Headquarters Building, 1001 I St. in Sacramento.

Merkley encouraged farmers and ranchers who divert water to attend the meeting, to explain how the emergency regulations, as proposed, would affect their ability to comply.

He said comments from farmers and ranchers might help the water board understand why requirements should be modified and should not be expanded to include small diversions or stockpond registrations.

"Some hurdles to compliance with any diversion measurement are the availability of power in remote areas, inability to reach diversion locations during all months due to weather conditions, cold-weather damage to equipment, and ponds filled from multiple sources," Merkley said.

Information on the proposed regulation is at www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/measurement_regulation/.

(Kate Campbell is an assistant editor of Ag Alert. She may be contacted at kcampbell@cfbf.com.)

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Cooperation Among Farmers Will Be Essential for Future, Farm Leader Says

California Farm Bureau Federation

In responding to water shortages, forming new groundwater management agencies, and engaging in political advocacy, California farmers and ranchers must unite and cooperate as never before, according to California Farm Bureau Federation President Paul Wenger. Wenger spoke during the opening general session of the 97th CFBF Annual Meeting in Reno.

The past year has been challenging, Wenger said, as lingering drought and water shortages placed additional focus on agricultural water use even as many farmers and ranchers—himself included—lost crops due to lack of available water.

Having recently returned from a trip to Australia, which reconfigured its water rights system as the result of a 13-year drought, he said farmers there found that once their water rights were separated from their land, "they had lost one of the greatest assets they had had." As a result, a significant amount of Australian farmland will be permanently fallowed.

"It didn't need to be," Wenger said, "and it certainly doesn't need to be here in California."

Wenger said the formation of local groundwater sustainability agencies in California will require farmers and ranchers to work together to ensure groundwater is managed appropriately.

"Put the pressure on the folks in your area to come together … to make sure they can control their groundwater effectively, locally," Wenger said.

With an election year coming that he said would be "hugely important," Wenger urged farmers and ranchers to make political action a part of their "everyday budget."

"If we will continue to work together, we will not just endure, but we will thrive," Wenger said.

The California Farm Bureau Federation works to protect family farms and ranches on behalf of more than 53,000 members statewide and as part of a nationwide network of more than 6.2 million Farm Bureau members.

Australia

Continued from p. 7

perspective on the causes and effects of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, which governs two large rivers feeding a key agricultural region. Many parallels became evident to me as a potential harbinger for California agriculture, should we fail to heed the experiences of Australia's farmers.

One of the underlying issues was that agricultural interests became fractured among different commodities and regions within the Murray-Darling region. Because the producers had been doing fairly well financially before the drought, a sense of self-reliance became their eventual downfall. As those engaged in agricultural pursuits became a smaller component of Australia's overall population, their political clout and influence waned. Many of the water rights reforms had already been underway for decades, but were quickly consummated during the intense drought.

As Australian government officials and academicians developed the MDBP, they focused solely on the daily water use of their citizens—but not the water demand to produce the food they would need each day. A person can get by with 50 gallons of water a day for drinking, showering and the like, but to produce a 1,200-calorie daily diet requires 850 to 1,200 gallons of water. When questioned about that, the answer was, "We can always import our food."

Unfortunately, I see many comparisons to California. As the sixth-largest agricultural producer in the world, California's importance as a food source is often overlooked and under-appreciated. Most Californians today, even after four years of drought, have the greatest opportunity to access high-quality food choices of any people in the world.

As California farmers and ranchers and agricultural businesses, we should take heed of the experiences of our Australian counterparts. We should not be marginalized because we have become complacent or self-reliant. With less than one-half of 1 percent of Californians directly engaged in production agriculture, we cannot allow ourselves to become fractured by commodity or region.

With the challenges of moving water effectively throughout our state and with last year's passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, we must be vigilant to protect our water rights, as they will surely continue to be attacked. The answer for California water problems is not to further divide a shrinking allocation of water, but to significantly upgrade our water supply infrastructure to accommodate the growth not only of our population, but of business, including agriculture—while maintaining a resilient environment. We must remember that the rest of the world relies heavily on the crops that grow in our fields to feed them, just as we rely upon other nations for so many imported, non-food consumer goods.

California farmers and ranchers must work together to maintain and grow our political relevance. We must maintain strong cross-commodity and regional cooperation, so we can maximize our effectiveness. California agriculture has set a high mark for the rest of the world to follow, from our ability to squeeze the most crop per drop of water and from our ability to reduce the carbon footprint of our farms and ranches.

Let's not be taken for granted but stand up and work together to defend and promote one of the richest agricultural resources in the world—California. As a California farmer, I am proud to say: We are not Australia. We are California!

Proteus, Inc. Searching for New CEO

Dave Adalian

A nationwide search is underway to find Proteus, Inc.'s new CEO following current CEO Mike McCann announcement he will retire next year after 15 years as head of the jobs, training and assistance center.

Begun in Visalia in 1967 as an adult training center, Proteus has expanded its programs during the last 50 years to offer a range of job placement, education and training for all ages, energy-saving programs, foster family placement and adoption, youth and community centers, and a range of other services. Operating 30 offices in Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Kern, San Bernardino and North Los Angeles counties, Proteus serves some 40,000 low-income customers annually.

Many-Faceted Organization

"We do just about everything," said Jeana Brooks, communications and employee relations analyst for the organization. That broad mandate complicates the search for a new leader.

"We want someone (with a) non-profit background," she said. "It's kind of hard to find, since there are so few. It's a very specialized area. It's very different from for-profit."

Confusing the picture even further, Proteus's energy division is for-profit, meaning the candidate they find to fill McCann's shoes will need experience in both arenas. The right person will also need to have a soft spot for the people Proteus serves. Brooks cited the work and qualities of McCann's predecessor Bill Maguy as an example.

"Someone that has a kind-of-hard to explain set of characteristics, a heart. Mr. Maguy was a former priest. Mr. McCann has the same vision. We're looking for someone who can continue that vision," she said. "Someone who's also going to be flexible because this industry is always changing because of what's happening. We've always just rolled along like that."

The Right Person

The candidate who wins the job can expect an annual salary in the $110,000 to $140,000 range, and will bring maturity, energy and enthusiasm to the position. They'll also need the normal set of business and communication skills, as well as "sensitivity to the human condition and individual differences" and commitment to the values that make Proteus unique as an organization.

"The board is seeking an individual who will continue the legacy for which Proteus, Inc. was founded, but also bring with them a clear vision for its future grown and sustainability," said Richard Rodriguez, vice-chair of Proteus's board of directors.

Potential candidates can find out more about the position and submit an application at www.proteusinc.org.

The Getting is Good

The person they pick to fill McCann's shoes will find Proteus in top health when they take over. McCann is going to make certain of it.

"My goal is to make sure when I leave the place is in solid shape, and it is right now, so I better get while the getting is good," he said. "It's time. We've got new generations coming up. They've got new ideas and directions, and that's healthy."

McCann had his own ideas when he joined Proteus as a data systems manager in 1984, ideas born while serving in the US Navy and working as a laborer on a pear ranch in Oregon, and refined during the decade it took him to become Proteus's chief financial officer. He put them into practice completely in 2000, when he took over as CEO from Maguy.

During McCann's tenure as CEO, Proteus received the California Award of Performance Excellence Prospector Award in 2004 and the California Award of Performance Excellence Eureka Award in 2007. McCann sits on the board of La Cooperativa, an alliance of groups that assist farmworkers in the Western US, and served as treasurer of the Western Alliance Farmworker Advocates.

It's Been a Privilege

While leaving is bittersweet, the time is right to go, McCann said.

"I can hang on a few more years, but I've got a bucket list I want to take care of while I still can," he said. "It involves a lot of travel, getting out of the stream."

McCann's retirement coincides with his wife Gail's retirement from Fresno County Health and Human Services, and the couple will spend a lot of time visiting with relatives and reconnecting with them. They will also be doing a lot of sightseeing.

"This is an active position I'm in, so I don't get a lot of free time to do things like that," he said. "About half the people say you'll hate it, the other says you'll love it. I'm going to find out."

No matter what he discovers, McCann will have the satisfaction of a job well done.

"It's been humbling and a privilege," he said. "My heart's in what I do. We're all servants for each other. To be able to lead in that direction has been an honor."

Darcy Staberg, center, is the new President of the Tulare County Association of Realtors.

2015 Installation of Tulare County Association of Realtors Officers

Staff Reports

The Tulare County Association of REALTORS® swore in their 2016 Officers and Directors at the Visalia Convention Center during their Annual Installation & Holiday Luncheon on Wednesday, December 9th.

Master of Ceremonies, Steve Pitts, Introduced (President) Darcy Staberg, (President-Elect) Ed Morton, (Secretary Treasurer) Ruben Olguin as well as the following Directors: Brian Gilbert, Jose Jimenez, Connie Kautz, Natalie Iaquinto, Bob Clark, Wendy Simpson-Little, Mike Allen and Joseph Nguyen, as the incoming 2016 Officers and Directors.

Senator Jean Fuller, Assemblyman Devon Mathis, Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward, Mayor Steve Nelson (Visalia) and many other local dignitaries were in attendance to offer their congratulations to the incoming officers and directors. Mark Avedian 2016 California Association of Realtors Region 12 Chair administered the Oath of Office during the swearing in Ceremony. The 2015 President, Scott Ellis officially passed the gavel to Incoming 2016 President Darcy Staberg. The Presidential Awards were presented to Heather Ruggles (Property ID), Natalie Iaquinto (Modern Broker) and Nicole Juarez (Equity Group). A Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award was dedicated in memory of Kelly Salcedo (RE/MAX – All Estates), her husband Steve Salcedo accepted the award on her behalf. Scott Klassen of Academy Mortgage, presented this year's Affiliate of The Year Award to Andy Mota (Mota Insurance Agency). Melva Dixon (Avedian Properties) presented this year's REALTOR® of the Year to Karen Clark-Osborne (Modern Broker).

Special performances in Honor of Incoming President Staberg included Rick Perez, Diana Jasso, Anne Brown, Taucha Miller, Heather Ruggles, Ruben Olguin, Scott Klassen, Joseph Nguyen, Teresa Renteria and Marina Rojas.

TCAOR members filled the hallway of the Visalia Convention Center with hundreds of new unwrapped toys and blankets, as well as monetary gifts, were contributed by the members in attendance and were donated to CASA of Tulare County for the third consecutive year.

On behalf of The Tulare County Association of REALTORS® we would like to thank everyone for attending & making it a memorable event.

If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview, please call Darcy Staberg at 559-827-5757 or email her at darcy@darcystaberg.com

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TNR

Continued from p. 1

are euthanized. The result is a healthy colony of cats that keep other cats from joining. The bridge colony in Mooney Grove had 56 cats before a group of cat advocates fixed and vaccinated them on their own. The colony is now down to 15. The takeaway for the committee members was that this program is free, humane and greatly reduces the number of cats.

John Hess, Tulare County administrative analyst, was asked to research other organizations that had used TNR. He reported that both Stanford University and Disneyland use the TNR program and that it is working. He added that Stanford was highly supportive of the program and said that the students, athletes and staff were all for it.

The City of Los Angeles has had a rockier time putting TNR into place because they were sued by the Audubon Society.Feral cats are notorious for hunting songbirds and the Audubon Society believes responsible cat owners should keep their pets indoors and feral cats should be eliminated to protect wildlife. Los Angeles and the Audubon Society came to a compromise on where the feral cats can be released. It is unknown as of yet how successful the program has been in the city.

Option two is to keep the existing county policy, which is to trap the cats and take them to animal control where virtually all of them are euthanized. The current system costs the tax payers about $140 per cat and TCAC euthanizes hundreds of feral cats a year, though they do not separate which cats come from Mooney Grove. NeilPilegard, Tulare County park and recreation manager has been a vanguard of this county policy. Several letters were submitted to the committee that expressed that it is inhumane to leave cats to survive in the wild. Others mentioned that the cats may carry diseases and they kill wildlife in Mooney Grove.

Finally, Mike Chrisman, chairman of the PACasked, "How long has the county used this policy?"

"Twenty-fiveyears," Pilegard replied.

"So your program is not working." said Chrisman.

In the spirit of cooperation,Pilegard recommended that the PAC adopt option three. He introduced the manager of Tulare County Animal Control, Patrick Hamblin. Hamblin said that he was only informed of the debate the day before and didn't have much to add.

TCAC had just started considering a barn program for feral cats but they were only in the discussion stage. As of now all feral cats are euthanized that come into TCAC unless they are kittens. NanetteKuswa, DVM, owner of Companion Animal Medical Center,said that a barn program where feral cats can be relocated is a good idea, but such a program can only deal with dozens of cats. She said that Visalia has around 130,000 feral cats. Also, TCAC does not have a facility to house the feral cats while they wait for placement in a barn.She added that cats tend to return "home" after attempts to relocate.

Chrisman asked Hamblin several times, and in different ways, his opinion of TNR, but Hamblin refused to give it. Pilegard had invited him to speak on the barn program but Hamblin did not look pleased about being put in the middle of what had been a tense conversation.

For his second speaker, Pilegard introduced a biologist forUS Department of Fish and Game in Tulare County. The biologist presented a power point that was 20 years old and focused on the hazards of releasing cats into a wildlife habitat. The information in the power point was outdated and no longer true. The biologist apologized for the dated material and said that feral cats were very low on Fish and Wildlife's list of priorities.

Committee member Carol Finney said that she had a great amount of uneasiness with option three and doesn't see how it would work. Chrisman suggested that the committee move forward with option one and asked Hess to work out the legal details with his staff and VFCC.

Banning Smoking in County Parks

The next item on the agenda was a presentation on the proposed Health Advisory Committee's ban on smoking in county parks. The same presentation was shown to the board of supervisors a few months ago but they voted 4-1 against it, with Supervisor Pete Vander Poel voting for the ban. The supervisors decided on creating smoking areas within the park and assigned the PAC to research the idea and come up with designated smoking areas.

The PAC agreed with the board that it was a bad idea to completely ban smoking in the park. A Tulare County Parks' employee pointed out that when patrons pay to rent the arbors they expect to be able to smoke. She would have to advise patrons before they booked the arbor about the ban and the park would lose revenue. The PAC agreed that secondhand smoke was unhealthy but thata total ban was unenforceable. The Tulare County Sheriff's Department and the Visalia Police Department said they would not have time to chase after smokers.

Carol Finney suggested that the parks put up signs requesting that patrons do not smoke, thus skipping the hassle and expense of creating a new ordinance. Not all PAC members were in favor of a ban so this was an acceptable compromise. It is already illegal to smoke within 25 feet of a building or a playground, so it was suggested that at Mooney Grove put the signs on the arbors and around the basketball hoops. Such signs could say, "Healthy lungs at work here" or "There is no level of exposure to smoke that is risk free." Pilegard said signs that encourage no smoking, lets people do the enforcing and is what Visalia ultimately decided to do at their parks.

A Wild Goose Chase

In other business, it may be months before the new Mooney Grove well becomes functional because it hasn't been put on Edison's list to be hooked up to the grid. Concerning reducing the number of geese in the park, the product that makes bird eggs sterile is not longer legal in California.

The next PAC meeting is 3pm at the new Agriculture Museum in Mooney Grove. The public is invited to attend and comment during the meeting.

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Briefly...

SIERRA VIEW MEDICAL CENTER CANDLELIGHT VIGIL IN HONOR OF SKYLIFE4 AIR AMBULANCE

Sierra View Medical Center was saddened to hear about the loss of a patient and an experienced healthcare team that has served alongside us in caring for the health needs of the community. Our hearts are heavy with the loss experienced by the medical community and we extend our deepest condolences and prayers to the families of all those aboard Skylife4.

The vigil will be held at Sierra View Medical Center, located at 465 W. Putnam Ave., Porterville, CA 93257, on Thursday, December 17, 2015, 6:52pm

As caregivers, we are committed to the service of others and healing illness and wounds. It is our hope that the support from the medical community and the public at large will help mend and heal the loss for the families and those affected. Emergency medical personnel are the cornerstone of healthcare teams. Their passion for service places them in harm's way, but they accept the challenge to provide care and support for the communities they serve. Sierra View Medical Center would like to extend our appreciation to all emergency medical personnel for their role in the care process in our community and throughout the country. Please join us for a candlelight vigil as we gather to pray and offer support for all involved.

CSET RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS FOR FREE TAX ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Community Services Employment Training (CSET) is seeking volunteers to assist with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. VITA provides free tax preparation and electronic filing services to Tulare County households with less than $54,000 annual income.

Approximately 150 volunteers are needed for the VITA program, which runs from February 6 through April 9, 2016. Tax preparation services will be provided in Cutler, Porterville, Tulare and Visalia. Bilingual volunteers are greatly needed.

In tax year 2015, VITA filed more than 2,000 tax returns, which brought more than $2.6 million back to Tulare County. Volunteers will complete a training course to become an IRS certified volunteer tax preparer.

The four week volunteer training begins Saturday, January 9, 2016 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and will be held every Saturday in January at the Visalia CSET office and Porterville Employment Connection.

"The time and dedication of community volunteers allows us to provide this high quality tax preparation service to our families," stated Albert Cendejas, CSET Assistant Director of Community Initiatives. "Not only is this an excellent opportunity to give back, but it is also a chance to gain valuable tax knowledge and skills."

This is a high impact volunteer opportunity for civic-minded individuals to assist lower-income families in our communities. It is a great work experience opportunity for high school youth and adults exploring careers in financial services. Retired financial professionals are excellent candidates to volunteer to assist their neighbors.

You can sign up to volunteer by visiting www.cset.org. The four week volunteer training starts January 9 and will continue for three consecutive Saturdays. For more information, contact Albert Cendejas at (559) 741-4628 or Albert.Cendejas@cset.org.

PC SPRING REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

Porterville College announced Dec. 2 that registration for the 2016 Spring Semester is now open to the public.

Students can register online by visiting the PC website at www.portervillecollege.edu. Students simply fill out an Admission (first time students) or Update form, attend assessment and orientation, visit a counselor and complete a student educational plan, then register for classes on the web.

Current students simply need to log into InsidePC, select the Student tab and select "Add or Drop Classes" from Registration Tools. A searchable and downloadable class schedule is available online for students to view what classes are still available, waitlist only or closed [full].

PC also offers community education (non-credit courses), online, late-start and weekend classes, as well as summer session. Even if you work full time and have a family, Porterville College can help you accomplish your educational goals. PC offers childcare, financial aid, scholarships, additional assistance to first-generation students and special populations, student work programs and evening classes.

Porterville College is located at 100 East College Avenue in Porterville. For more information visit www.portervillecollege.edu or call (559) 791-2200. You can also find Porterville College on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube and Yelp.

WEST HILLS COLLEGE COALINGA PSYCHIATRIC TECHNICIAN PROGRAM GRADUATION ON DEC. 17

WHCC's Psychiatric Technician Program will award certificates to 23 students on Dec. 17 during a graduation and pinning ceremony.

The ceremony will take place in the WHCC theater and will begin at 6 p.m.

"The Psych Tech program is highly valued," said program instructor Hector Dam-Mikkelsen. "Not only is it equipping graduates with a highly desired skill set in the mental and disability sectors, but it is also a positive economic driving force with a tremendous ripple effect to the local economy. Graduates are consistently increasing their annual incomes and improving the quality of their lives."

For more information, call 934-2000.

READ TO RIDE? WHAT*S THAT?

The Tulare County Library folks love reading and holidays and the Global Winter Wonderland, so they've put these things together in a "Read to Ride" program for kids Kindergarten through 8th grade.

Children earn a free ticket to the Global Winter Wonderland at the Tulare County Fairgrounds after they read two books, fill out a form, and return it to a library branch. Tickets can be redeemed at the Wonderland between Monday, December 21st and Saturday, December 26, 2015. Forms can be picked up now at the Children*s Desk in the Visalia Branch or at any other branch from now until December 26th. One ticket per child limit.

Global Winter Wonderland is open now until Sunday, January 3, 2016. For more information on this library children's program, go to www.tularecountylibrary.org or call 559-713-2731.

SIERRA VIEW MEDICAL CENTER BLOOD DRIVE

In association with the Central California Blood Center, Sierra View Medical Center will be hosting a Blood Drive on Friday, December 18, 2015.

A blood mobile will be on-site in the Sierra View Medical Center parking lot from 10 AM to 3 PM. All donors will receive a raffle ticket to have a chance to win a gift card.

This event is open to the public. Donors must be in good general health, a minimum of 110 pounds and be at least 17 years old (16 years old with written parental consent).

Senior citizens are encouraged to donate, as there is no upper age limit. Donors are encouraged to eat a good meal and drink plenty of water within four hours prior to their donation, which can be done every eight weeks.

Photo identification and a social security number are required at donor registration.

PC UNVEILS NEW COMMUNITY EDUCATION OFFERINGS

Don't miss out! There is still time to register for a Porterville College Community Education course. Community Education courses are designed to meet the needs of the community. These non-credit courses are designed to provide learning and enjoyment in a friendly, worry-free environment at a reasonable cost.

Current offerings include: Exercise for the Community, Holiday Cooking, Notary Public and Zumba. Pre-registration is required for all classes.

Exercise for the Community — Looking for all the perks of a gym without the sign-up fees? Porterville College is offering Exercise for the Community Monday through Thursdays from 7 to 8 a.m. or 8 to 9 a.m. in the PC Fitness Center starting Jan. 19 through May 12. Cost is $80 per person. This class is open to the public. Prior registration is required.

Holiday Cooking — Overcome the stress of preparing holiday meals by taking a three-hour class at Porterville College. Let PC Chef Pierce Thomas teach you how to prepare a stress-free meal that everyone is sure to love. Class takes place from 9 a.m. to noon Friday, Dec. 18 in the Student Center Cafeteria. Learn to prepare baked apples, apple strudel, crème brulee, and more. Cost is $35. This class is open to the public. Prior registration is required.

Notary Public — Are you approaching your commission expiration date? To avoid having a break in your commission, register for your State Notary class today. Why spend all day renewing your commission? As a commissioned Notary, you qualify to take our 3-Hour Refresher Course from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Jan. 21 at Porterville College in SM-125. Notaries who are being re-commissioned may arrive at 8 a.m. and sit in on the entire course. The standard class takes place from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 21 in Room SM 125. Cost is $70 plus exam fee. Prior registration is required. For the exam, please bring a $40 check or money order to class made payable to "Secretary of State."

Zumba — Looking to lose weight, and have fun? Zumba is a Latin-dance based fitness phenomenon that has been sweeping the nation. The class combines intervals of fast and slow rhythms with low-impact, high-energy dance moves. Each dance has a repetitive set of moves that are easy to follow so everyone can do them. Class starts Jan. 25 and goes through April 11, every Monday and Wednesday from 6 to 7 p.m. in the Student Center Conference Room. Cost is $60. This class is open to the public. Prior registration is required.

To register for classes, go to www.porterville.asapconnected.com or visit the PC website at www.portervillecollege.edu. You can also register in person at the Porterville College Admissions and Records Office, 100 East College Avenue in Porterville. For more information please contact Sam Aunai at (559) 791-2308 or email communityed@portervillecollege.edu.

Hanford

Continued from p. 1

more information, and that a citizen's committee should have been formed to educate themselves and the residents about Hanford's water situation.

Earnst Lopez said he understood that Hanford was "up against a wall," but that it was ironic that the city's seal says, "Working For a Better Tomorrow"-- because that is exactly what did not happen.

After the public hearing was closed Hanford City Clerk, Jennifer Gomez, reported that there were 115 letters of protest and none in favor.

Out of those who spoke during the public hearing, 11 were against and one was in favor. The matter was then turned over to the council for a vote.

Mayor Mendes expounded on Lopez' point saying that he believes past city councils kicked the can down the road for too long and that was why he was voting for the increase.

Ayers was upset that rates had not gone up before and said the increase is too much.

Still, he reluctantly voted in favor. Curry said he was voting for the increase because Hanford had hit a perfect storm of reduced revenue along with increased costs.

Pannett and Ramirez voted against the increase because, they said, the council did not do its due diligence in informing the public and that the rate increase should be more gradual.

"We should have planned for this years ago. I feel for the citizens so I can't vote for this." said Pannett.

Visalia Rescue Mission Makes Changes to Help Change Lives

Nancy Vigran

For more than three decades the Visalia Rescue Mission has been involved in the local community. It has grown immensely through the years, but its basic goal has remained the same, to aide those in need by teaching them to help themselves.

Anyone, man or woman, of any race or religion, straight or gay, may get a meal at VRM's kitchen, 365 days of the year. The same is true of a dry, warm place to sleep at night. And women may also bring their children up to the age of 12.

But, as of January 1, a few things will change. To further enhance the mission's desire to help those who want to help themselves, lunch will no longer be offered. There will also be a moratorium on consecutive night stays to 30, unless someone is working with a case worker.

The reasoning is simple, said Ryan Stillwater, director of community engagement.

"We want to remain proactive," he said, "not just aiding, but helping."

Discontinuing lunch service "breaks the cycle" of hanging out on the property, he said. Unless someone is waiting to meet with a counselor, they can be out looking for work, or doing something else proactive.

"I think, for us, we have been in a season of transition – new leadership, new perspective and asking the question, 'Have we become and enabling factor?'" he said.

Stillwater himself has been with VRM for a little more than two years. Recently, the mission acquired a new director, Al Oliver.

Also starting January 1, VRM's Life Change Academy will lengthen from eight months to 12. The academy plans to open a new learning center to better help students without a high school diploma study for their GED exam, as well as offering practical skills training.

VRM is faith-based. The Life Change Academy promotes "Hope and restoration through Jesus Christ." And, for those not in the academy but seeking an overnight stay in the shelter, they attend a nightly religious service. However, attendees do not have to agree with the particular religion followed or taught, or any religion at all.

"We are confident enough (in religion)," Stillwater said, "nothing is forced. But, I haven't seen a graduate yet, who hasn't taken a nibble.

"Are we force-feeding? Absolutely not – what would be the point?" Stillwater said. "But I have heard a lot of people say, 'This isn't my first program, but this is my first one that's worked.'"

The VRM men's shelter houses 52 beds; the women's houses 26 beds. There are an additional 88 beds at the men's and women's academies.

There are a lot more homeless men than women in the Tulare County area, Stillwater said. Thus, more beds are available in the men's shelter and through the men's academy.

Currently, VRM is renovating an old church chapel for an additional 30 beds.

Gracie Sanchez now leads a functional, fulfilling life as administrative assistant at the Visalia Rescue Mission, following her graduation from the mission's Life Change Academy. Nancy Vigran/Valley Voice

The December, 2015 Visalia Rescue Mission, Life Change Academy graduating class, from left to right: Mike, Jeffrey, Matt and Robert. Courtesy/4Creeks Creative

While a lot of homeless do not have any form of identification, the shelter staff gets to know them. Those actively working with a case manager, may lengthen the 30-day moratorium for up to 90-days with a case manager's approval, Stillwater said. Those wanting a bed, but showing no motivation toward picking their lives up will not be allowed to stay for more than 30 consecutive days. It will then be 45 days before they can return. VRM tolerates no drugs or alcohol.

There are those who decide they want to go through the academy on their own, but there are also those that are mandated to go through recovery by the courts. VRM works with both and maintains a waiting list.

"But, if they're not ready, no program is going to help," Stillwater said.

Each attendee is previously assessed by VRM personnel before being accepted. The first few months comprise an assessment period. Once individuals reach the point where they feel it is possible to rehabilitate, they may receive day or weekend passes to venture back out into the community.

The waiting list can add to one's desire to succeed, Stillwater said.

"I had to wait a month, and I did – I'm ready," is something VRM likes to hear from an academy entrant, he added.

Gracie Sanchez graduated from the academy in 2012, and now works as an administrative assistant in the VRM office. She formerly worked in the medical field, back and front office, before she became addicted to alcohol and drugs. She was in and out of jail, and lost custody of her children.

"I was tired of the life I was living," she said. When released from jail for drug-related charges, the court ordered her to enter a facility and she entered VRM's academy.

"I realized that if I was going to have any type of relationship with my kids, I had to change," she said.

"What attracted me to the program, was that it was God-centered," she said. "I know that's why it worked."

Sanchez now has a good relationship with her children.

Stillwater said he feels that a lot more could be done within the community for those who are in need, if everyone just took a moment to reach out. Giving someone a dollar, or food, is not the solution, he said.

"I think what's missing, it isn't the food," he said, "it's the time you spend listening to them. Nine out of 10 times, their reaction is very positive if you engage in conversation with them."

Admittedly, when Stillwater first began working with VRM, his perspective had changed. His wife questioned his patience, when he told her of his new position. But, he has adapted to it and is very happy with his work.

"Check your gut," he said. "If you just make a choice to set aside your fears. "If people just took a small chance – it's huge," he said. "Just take a moment – we are much more creative than just giving them another dollar."

VRM is funded in part by its active thrift business. It also holds annual fund-raising events throughout the year and relies on the generosity of the community to keeps its doors open.

Voices of the Valley

Ron Irish

Jan M. Krafve

It has often been said that some people are born to lead and some people are born to serve. Ron Irish shows us that some people are born to do both. For more than 20 years he has served Porterville and the surrounding communities as an elected leader in local politics.

Ron Irish is probably best known for being Mayor of Porterville. He has also been on many key committees for the city as well as the county. He was first elected to Porterville City Council in 1997 and completed three, four-year terms as a city councilman. During his tenure he was mayor as well as vice-mayor of the City of Porterville. Prior to holding these positions he was elected to the Camp Nelson Water Board and served in this capacity for eight years.

Ron has been an active member of the Porterville Chamber of Commerce since 1978. He is a long-standing member of the Elks Lodge and a 32nd degree Mason. He also served on several local non-profit boards. Both he and his wife, Teri, are Rotarians and have held official positions within the local chapter.

To better understand the man behind the accolades, Ron was asked to provide a little background information about his life. He took a moment to reflect before he spoke. Then he began to talk about himself openly and without hesitation. The natural tone of his voice is gentle with an earnest sense of honesty and authority, easily drawing the listener in.

"I was born in Missouri and was quick to exercise my option and move to Bakersfield, California when I was just a little guy."

With a twinkle in his eye, he said, "When you're only three years old, the wisest decision you can make is to move with your parents since you're not quite ready to be on your own yet!"

He was unable to stifle his own laugh at what he'd just said. As his friends all know, anecdotes like this are indicative of the man.

When asked if there was any particular experience that set the course of his destiny in motion, he excitedly told about the turning point for his choice of career.

"In 1963, the horizons I'd known as a youth were stretched all the way to the other side of the world. I was uprooted from my small hometown and thrust into the Vietnam War. I spent four years serving in the US Navy. My assignment involved electronic surveillance and security. The more I learned, the deeper my fascination grew. It became clear that this was exactly what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

After finishing his tour in the military, Ron enrolled at Fresno State.

"Do you know that I worked full-time for a local security company, carried 28 units a semester, and raised two small daughters," he said. "I barely had time to catch any sleep in those days."

There was a momentary lapse in the conversation then. You could tell his thoughts were centered on the past.

"Those certainly weren't the easiest times of my life and even tougher ones were soon to follow. I think I'll tell the story.

"I suddenly found myself without a job and had a family to support. In my field there weren't a lot of open positions anywhere in California, let alone Fresno. It was a much smaller city in those days. So I packed up all of our belongings, my wife and two children and drove to Bakersfield. Not knowing what our future would bring, I left them in the care of my mother-in-law. I'd been told of a possible job opening in San Diego, so off I went.

"When I reached San Diego, I got myself a bed at the YMCA. I couldn't afford to spend money on a motel. I found the company, applied for the position, and was interviewed by the owner.

"At the end of the interview we walked outside and I was asked what wage would I require if I worked there. I looked him in the eyes and said, 'minimum wage.' It was about $2.15 an hour back then. I think he was shocked by my answer. However, I clarified my needs and once again I told him I'd work for minimum wage, but only for two weeks. At the end of two weeks I would expect to have a higher pay rate, based upon my performance. He hired me on the spot.

"I drove back to Bakersfield, packed a suitcase full of canned goods, left my car with my family, and took a bus back to my new job. The San Diego YMCA became my home. We weren't allowed to cook there, so each weekend I returned to Bakersfield with my one suitcase and refilled it with canned goods. You'd be surprised what you can cook over a room heater! Nine months later I was the second highest paid employee and had saved enough money to bring my family down to San Diego to live with me."

Ron went on to explain why he told this story, "Life is about choices. You can either choose to work for your dreams or you can let them go by. My hobby is my job. There's nothing else that I would rather do. The choice I made, to remain in the security field put me where I am today, and I am still grateful that I was given a chance to work."

In late in 1969, a promising position with a local company brought Ron and his two daughters to Porterville. It was fate that he settled there, as his horizons once again opened up when he met the love of his life, Teri. They built their world together raising two girls, and in 1978, opened Stop Alarm, an electronic security monitoring company.

Countless hours were spent building their new business from the ground up. Still, Ron and Teri made time for their family as well as their community. They became actively involved in the Porterville Chamber of Commerce, and Ron eventually enrolled in the yearlong Leadership Porterville program offered by the Chamber.

According to Ron, "It changed our lives forever."

Thirty plus years later, the couple still own and operate Stop Alarm. They recently purchased an abandoned building and moved the business to its new location, right in the heart of downtown Porterville. It's within walking distance of the Chamber of Commerce and also supports the revitalization campaign for downtown Porterville.

As Ron talked about the expansion, the passion for his work resounded in his voice.

"It took over a year to renovate this building to our specifications," he said. "It was literally an outside shell. Teri and I designed everything from floor to ceiling. After my workday, I would spend more time here than I did at home. As you can see, it now fits the needs of our business perfectly. This is the only industrial building we've owned."

Ron Irish and his wife, Terri. Jan M. Krafve/Valley Voice

He purposely designed his new office as a tranquil place with beautiful, scenic photos, gallery-hung on the walls.

"Those are my own pictures. I have a passion for photography and have documented our travels. Teri and I have been to every continent around the world except for Australia. That's next on the travel agenda," he said.

When asked why he originally ran for the Porterville City Council, he responded, "I credit Leadership Porterville. As a business owner and active member of the Porterville Chamber of Commerce, I learned that it takes more to building a community and keep it running than just going to and from work every day. Through this program, my knowledge was expanded as to the functioning of our community. I had never really thought about how the streetlights got turned on each night, or who controlled the water that I used in my business and my home."

He went on to further explain, "I was quite naive about the decision-making process that kept my city alive and growing until I met some strong, dedicated members who were on the current city council. I realized that they were people just like you and me. They were volunteers who were willing to give their time and expertise for the good of our city. So I decided to put my hat in the ring. I felt it was important to give back to the community which so graciously welcomed me into the fold."

The first time Ron ran for public office he was elected to city council. He realized that there was a lot to learn and it became overwhelming.

"In retrospect", he said, "I was lucky to have served with such tolerant and experienced people. Boyd Levitt and Judy Gibbons took me under their collective wings and gave me guidance. Not only did they teach me the necessary skills, but they also led by example. They mentored and encouraged me. I will be forever grateful."

Ron Irish has a simple philosophy about politics, "Lead by doing! I believe that to be a productive leader within the community, we need to reinforce our words with corresponding actions. In this way, whatever stance or decision we make on behalf of our community, our intent is made clear for everyone to see. Because of my involvement in local politics, I've learned that we all have 'me' attitudes at different times of our lives. Serving the public opened up doors to the 'we' attitudes and made me more conscious of the needs of the people around me.

"As a city councilman, it became evident to me that my title or position could be intimidating to some people. So, I tried to become more accessible and responsive to the concerns of all the people in our community, not just the people that were comfortable enough to seek me out."

He went on to explain how he personally believes that it is important for elected officials to be at community projects and work side-by-side with the other citizens who come to help.

"In other words, don't ask another person to do something that you are unwilling to do yourself," he said.

During the interview, Ron made one thing clear. "One of the hardest things to accept is that the decisions we make as elected officials are based upon current knowledge available to us at that particular time. Down the line we may see that the result of those decisions produced a favorable outcome and we accomplished the initial goal. Other times we realize that the particular path or decision might not have been the best option after all. No matter what decision is made, not everyone in the city will agree. You just try to do your best for the community as a whole.

"I hope that the legacy I leave for others is one of personal action. You don't know what a small part plays in the big picture when it comes to the operation of your town. When we take time to give a little of ourselves, the whole community is strengthened."

Viewpoint

Donald Trump and the Ugly Underside of American Presidential Politics

Newell G. Bringhurst

Republican Presidential contender Donald Trump's highly charged rhetoric attacking various American ethnic-religious minorities dominates the current presidential campaign. The flamboyant billionaire entrepreneur has skillfully used inflammatory invectives to position himself as the Republican front-runner. Efforts to condemn Trump as bigoted, racist, and/or intolerably outside the American political mainstream have failed to dislodge him as the GOP's most popular candidate.

Trump's demagogic tactics targeting ethnic-religious groups is not new. It reflects an ugly underside of presidential politics deeply rooted in America's past. During the late 1790s then-President John Adams secured passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Adams justified his attack on recently arrived immigrants as necessary, given America's quasi-war against France. He also believed voters would unify behind his 1800 campaign for reelection. He lost.

In a more egregious ploy, President Andrew Jackson during the 1830s instituted the brutal removal of Native Americans—the Five Civilized Tribes of the Southwest—from ancestral lands in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. Along the "Trail of Tears" 4000 Cherokee died. The survivors resettled on barren wastelands in what eventually became Oklahoma. Southern slaveholders seized the land taken thereby further expanding the region's so-called Peculiar Institution. This exclusion enhanced Jackson's popularity. Slaveholders enthusiastically voted for Old Hickory—himself a slaveholder, allowing him two terms as president.

During the 1850s, two American religious minorities suffered discrimination. Catholics emerged as a major American religious denomination thanks to a huge influx of Irish and German immigrants. Protestants physically attacked recently arrived Catholics and in some cases set fire to their places of worship. In 1856, the anti-Catholic, anti-Immigrant Know-Nothing Party with ex-President Millard Fillmore as its standard barrier ran a strong third-party race against the two major political parties—the Democrats and Republicans.

The Mormon Church also faced attack from mainstream Americans. The Mormons' unique teachings, in particular plural marriage, made them a convenient target. In 1856, ambitious Republican and Democratic presidential candidates exploited that denomination's unpopularity. The newly formed Republican Party with famed explorer John C. Fremont as its standard barrier ran on a platform attacking Mormon polygamy and black slavery as "twin relics of barbarism." Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas, seeking the Democratic Party nomination assailed Mormonism as "an ulcer on the American body politic." Democrat James Buchanan who ultimately prevailed in the 1856 election declared the Mormons "in a state of rebellion." As president, Buchanan dispatched an armed force of 4,000, during the so-called Utah War, subjugating the Mormons and forcibly removing Brigham Young as territorial governor.

Throughout the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth various ethnic minorities came under attack. In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibiting Chinese laborers from entering the country. Forty years later, President Calvin Coolidge approved the even more restrictive 1924 Immigration Act banning the entry of all Asians as well as Arabs into the United States. This same act severely restricted the entry of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the forced removal of 117,000 Japanese-Americans from their west coast homes into so-called "Relocation Camps." This resulted from widespread hatred combined with hysteria unleashed by the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Such action represented a gross violation of American civil liberties given that two-thirds of those affected held American citizenship. Also bowing to anti-Semitic prejudice, Roosevelt limited the number of European Jewish refugees granted asylum. All this proved politically popular, helping Roosevelt win reelection to an unprecedented fourth term in 1944.

African-Americans also suffered continual discrimination. Despite the abolition of slavery and enactment of three amendments to the Federal Constitution intended to protect black freedmen following the Civil War, this minority endured restrictive Jim Crow laws. During the 1910s President Woodrow Wilson—himself a southerner, mandated the segregation of all African-American federal employees.

In 1968 Alabama's racist Governor George C. Wallace, ran for president as the nominee of his own self–styled pro-segregation, anti-black American Independent Party. He ran a strong race, carrying five states with 46 Electoral votes, and securing 13 percent of the popular vote.

Thus, Donald Trump is far from unique. His appeal continues strong among Republican voters, two thirds of whom support his controversial proposal to ban entry into the United States of all Muslims.

Trump's demagogic rants are reminiscent of those uttered by proto-fascist Louisiana Governor Huey Long during the 1930s; and subsequently by Red Baiting U. S Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in the 1950s. All this brings to mind George Santayana's famous dictum, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Newell G. Bringhurst is Professor Emeritus at College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California where he taught history and Political Science. He is the author-editor of 12 books dealing with various aspects of U.S Religious history and the American West. He can be reached at newellgb@hotmail.com

How Our Naive Understanding of Violence Helps ISIS

Paul K. Chappell

At West Point I learned that technology forces warfare to evolve. The reason soldiers today no longer ride horses into battle, use bows and arrows, and wield spears, is because of the gun. The reason people no longer fight in trenches, as they did during World War I, is because the tank and airplane were greatly improved and mass-produced. But there is a technological innovation that has changed warfare more than the gun, tank, or airplane. That technological innovation is mass media.

Today most people's understanding of violence is naive, because they do not realize how much the Internet and social media, the newest incarnations of mass media, have changed warfare. The most powerful weapon that ISIS has is the Internet with social media, which has allowed ISIS to recruit people from all over the world.

For most of human history, people from across the world had to send a military over land or sea to attack you, but the Internet and social media allow people from across the world to convince your fellow citizens to attack you. Several of the people who committed the ISIS terrorist attack in Paris were French nationals, and it now appears that the two people who committed the mass shooting in San Bernardino were influenced by ISIS.

To be effective ISIS needs two things to happen. It needs to dehumanize the people it kills, and it also needs Western countries to dehumanize Muslims. When Western countries dehumanize Muslims, this further alienates Muslim populations and increases recruitment for ISIS. ISIS commits horrible atrocities against Westerners because it wants us to overreact by stereotyping, dehumanizing, and alienating Muslims.

Every time Western countries stereotype, dehumanize, and alienate Muslims, they are doing exactly what ISIS wants. A basic principle of military strategy is that we should not do what our opponents want. In order for ISIS's plan to work, it needs to dehumanize its enemies, but perhaps more importantly, it needs Americans and Europeans to dehumanize Muslims.

ISIS cannot be compared to Nazi Germany, because the Nazis were not able to use the Internet and social media as a weapon of war and terrorism. Trying to fight ISIS the way we fought the Nazis, when today the Internet and social media have dramatically changed twenty-first century warfare, would be like trying to fight the Nazis by using horses, spears, bows and arrows. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers during the September 11th attacks were from Saudi Arabia, one of the United States' closest allies. None of the hijackers were from Iraq. ISIS seems to have better mastered the weapon of the Internet than Al Qaida, because ISIS is more adept at convincing French and American citizens to commit attacks.

Because technology has changed warfare in the twenty-first century and allowed ISIS to wage a digital military campaign, it is naive to believe that we can defeat terrorism by conquering and holding territory, which has become an archaic and counterproductive form of warfare. During the era of the Internet revolution, it is naive to believe that we can use violence to defeat the ideologies that sustain terrorism. ISIS and Al Qaida are global movements, and with the Internet and social media, they can recruit people from all over the world, including people on American and European soil. And they only have to recruit a tiny amount of Americans and Europeans, initiate a single attack, and kill a few people to cause the huge overreactions that they want from their opponents. Let us not react in ways that ISIS wants.

Pledging to Resist Fear and Hatred

Rivera Sun

At this time, it has become imperative for citizens to speak up and stand up against the rise of Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, and the politics of hatred. When this pledge from Showing Up For Racial Justice came to my attention, I did not hesitate to sign it.

I want to be known as a human being courageous enough to speak truth to power and meet unwarranted hatred with organized love. Our shared humanity calls us to this. I want to know about and assist the efforts of my fellow American citizens who reject the politics of hate and the practices of fear.

These are not times for passivity or silence. Donald Trump has publicly called for a registry of Muslims akin to the registry of Jews that presaged the yellow stars and concentration camps. We know how this story goes.

Already, in Texas, the politics of hate and the propaganda of fear have caused the KKK and other armed vigilante hate groups to threaten, intimidate, and demonstrate with guns outside of mosques and Islamic Centers. Christians and citizens of conscience are rising in peaceful, nonviolent counterdemonstrations to stop this.

These are not times to merely speak hollow words with no commitment to action behind them. We who believe in peace must organize tangible resistance to the misinformation and bigotry that give rise to violence and war. Already, our nation is engaged in military actions that promise only further cycles of violence, terrorism, and endless war.

By taking this pledge, I am committing to being a part of a movement that has had its parallel in every chapter of human history. In the era of Nazi Germany, this pledge would be signed by Sophie Scholl and the members of the White Rose, the Rosenstrausse women of Berlin who demanded the release of their Jewish husbands, the Danes who saved 7,220 Jews from death, André and Magda Trocmé and the citizens of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon who saved 3,500 Jews during the occupation of France.

These are times to search your soul and look for courage. This pledge is one way to demonstrate that you have found both.

Comments & Letters

In Response to Supervisor Cox

Dear Mr. Cox:

Read with interest your guest commentary in the *Times-Delta* on Dec 10th. You're very right; the good stewardship in the county finances would require that you would not spend more than is taken in. However, that's only part of the financial equation. It is your responsibility to also maintain the assets of the county in as good a condition as possible. Any one of us can add to our bank account by spending less than we take in if we neglect the repair and maintenance of our assets. Naturally our expenditures will be less than our income. However, over the long course, deferred maintenance becomes more and more expensive and so the initial savings is more than offset by the decay of the asset in question. This is exactly what you've allowed to happen to our beautiful Mooney Grove Park. Roofs that leak are not repaired, upkeep has been neglected. The lake is a disgraceful mess. Weeds grow around every thoroughfare. Worst yet, a well that went dry that was vital to the park's health and well-being has not been repaired for almost a year and a half. Over 40 trees including 20 historic oaks had to be cut down due to a risk of their falling. This is due entirely to the lack of water because you chose not to repair a well that was desperately needed by the park.

This well was allowed to sit dysfunctional until an emergency resolution had to be passed to award a no-bid contract to repair this well. How much more this cost the taxpayers is unknown. But I'm sure that had the problem with the well been addressed initially, it would have been tens of thousands of dollars less.

You also saw fit to pay a consulting firm that isn't even in this county $195,030.00 for a so called 20 year plan. There was nothing in this plan that calls for bringing the park up to a respectable standard. The chairman of your own parks commission called this almost $200,000 fiasco merely a wish list. Chances are that a lot of what is in your 20 year plan will not happen. And even if it does, it ignores the horrible condition of the park today. You also pushed for the construction of a so-called Farm Labor Museum that ended up costing the tax payers $3.6 million dollars; all this while the park continued to deteriorate into a disgraceful mess.

The park is understaffed and based on my observation since 2008, the management of the park appears to be incompetent. You wish to take credit for the financial soundness of the county's finances, not mentioning that almost every commodity grown in Tulare County have been at historically high levels, and land values have also sky rocketed in the last decade. I don't think that your financial acumen had much to do with that. You also want to compare the city of Visalia with the County of Tulare. I noticed that downtown Visalia seems to be thriving and that any city park that I have visited is clean, well-kept and pristine. Perhaps you can learn something from the people that are in charge of taking care of the city's assets. They've done a much better job than you have.

One would wonder what Mooney Grove would look like today if the $3.6 million that you squandered on the museum to nowhere and the almost $200,000 that you threw away on a 20 year plan to nowhere had been invested back into the rehabilitation, repair and maintenance of the park. Mooney Grove has been in decline at least since 2008 and I know that you have been out there several times during that time frame. You owe the people of this county a heartfelt apology for allowing one of not only Tulare County's, but the Valleys greatest resources, to fall into a disgraceful state of disrepair.

Mooney Grove is the oldest County Park in the State of California. Almost everyone that grew up here, that is over the age of 40, has fond memories of the time spent in our once beautiful park. Mr. Cox for you to have the gall to thump your chest about what a great financial genius you are when one of the county's greatest resources is allowed to fall into a disgraceful mess almost makes me laugh if it weren't so tragic. Hopefully a day of reckoning is coming with the next election.

John Rogers

In Response to Political Fix

Hello Catherine,

Sorry, but all week I've been unsuccessful in shaking off my compulsion to respond to your recent love for Mexico article. If you weren't such a good strong writer it would be easier for me to bite my lip. But you are also sounding like a shill for a certain political party.

There have been dozens of reporter types yelling all over the TV about Trump's latest comments about Muslim immigration. Not once did I hear a one use the word "temporary" in regards to a ban; like in an natural reaction to an emergency. In your article about Mexicans I didn't see any use of the word "illegal". I don't see much difference between "mass killings" and the weekly killings in our California towns.

Just look at all the news reports and the names involved.

One of the main reasons for my move to Three Rivers was the swimming hole near my house. About everyday during the summer my dogs and I would jump in the river. Over 3 years ago 3 people were shot, 2 dead, at our first swimming hole by a gangster visiting with his wife and little daughter. A fight and knifing occurred at our main swimming hole this last year. For 3 years now my pond has been closed every weekend. At times it feels like life according to the lowest common denominator.

Not too long ago Democrats were always pounding the "cheap labor" drum. What has changed and why are word games being played to manipulate people while actual lives are being regularly lost ?

Last but not least. In my world view there are no "crap" jobs. I saw an opportunity in a "job no one would do". I made a career around cleaning and selling old toilets. I became a contraband toilet man in the war on toilets.

Stephen Crigler

Hi, Catherine,

I believe you wrote the comments on the difference between what Europe does and the ideal American way of dealing with immigrants. If it wasn't you please pass this on to the writer. I don't have my copy of the Valley Voice before me. I wholeheartedly concur with your view of Mexican immigration. Though it is normal and usual for immigrants to start with crap jobs and then use the freedoms and opportunities we have to move up over time. I saw this process with the parents of my two Mexican son-in-laws. They smuggled themselves and their children into the states worked hard, were frugal and reared their kids well. Their adult children are now a mixture of college graduated professionals and successful business people.

The shooters and killers in the Boston Marathon, event, the Fort Hood and San Bernardino shootings were a different story. They were all given the same freedoms, even more so because they were legal, had the right to practice their religion freely (in Saudi Arabia no open public Christian churches are permitted). In most Muslim countries Christians face varying degrees of restriction and persecution. They had jobs, attended good schools, received refugee status, government aid, had the freedom to wear Muslim style garb, Hasan (the Fort Hood shooter) was entrusted with military psychiatric responsibilities. Yet they developed poisonous hate towards America when they chose to find meaning for their lives in the serious practice of fundamentalist Islam, a return to their roots - a type of Islam embraced by an appreciable percentage of the sizeable Muslim population around the world. Even in America with our more diffused Moslem population than the concentrated Muslim ghettos of Europe we have incubated killers. This makes me reluctant to allow more in, even if it is only a small percentage who are dangerous, why increase the size of the pond for them to swim and develop in? Traditional Islam teaches that Muslims are to be a conquering master warrior race with the right to rule Christians and Jews as second class citizens with limited rights. ISIS explicitly calls for this. Heady stuff for angry, aggressive men (and women).

After all the Swedes were an imperialistic power in the 1600's until humbled by the Russians in the Great Northern War in the early 1700's. In 950 the last thing you wanted to meet were vacationing Norwegians (Vikings) - now they pass out Nobel peace prizes. The Germans and the Japanese gave up the conquering warrior master race thing only a lifetime ago. We forget we stand at the end of centuries of development and don't realize how aggressive warfare is innate to the human beast and can have great appeal.

Frankly I'm trying to educate you on some bitter truths.

Letter writer requested to withhold name

Veteran's Corner

Medical Care vs. Claims

Joe Wright

The Department of Defense (DOD) provides military funeral honors at the burials of veterans on request from family members. Funeral honors can be given at private or government-operated cemeteries.

As provided by law, an honor guard detail for the burial of an eligible veteran shall consist of not less than two members of the Armed Forces. One member of the detail shall be a representative of the parent service of the deceased veteran. The honor detail will, at a minimum, perform a ceremony that includes the folding and presenting of the American flag to the next of kin and the playing of Taps.

Military families of eligible veterans request funeral honors through their funeral home director. Funeral home directors can request funeral honors from DOD, whether burial is in a national cemetery or another cemetery. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff at national cemeteries also can assist to arrange funeral honors at VA national cemeteries. Your funeral home director will assist you in obtaining a flag. More information on burial flags is available at http://www.cem.va.gov/bbene/bflags.asp.

A Presidential Memorial Certificate will be provided upon request. This is a parchment certificate with an inscription expressing the nation's grateful recognition of an honorably discharged, deceased veteran's service in the Armed Forces. The veteran's name is inscribed and the certificate bears the signature of the President. For information about requesting a Presidential Memorial Certificate and additional information refer to http://www.cem.va.gov/pmc.asp. DOD maintains a military funeral honors web site at https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/mfh. Our office can also assist with making these arrangements along with ordering flags, headstones and grave markers.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license. We can also issue Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans.

Contact Joe Wright if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.

Alta

Continued from p. 1

and despite cutting services and changing their business plan, the hospital closed in 2001. The Alta Healthcare District filed a Chapter 9 bankruptcy, a rare portion of the code reserved only for government entities. For the last 14 years, the AHD sat nearly idle, collecting its tiny percentage of property tax income and using it to repay its debts. Now, it's done.

"The bankruptcy's been closed," said Clifford Bressler, the Clovis-based CPA who oversaw AHD's finances during its insolvency and now works for the District as its administrator. "I was the gentleman in charge of collecting the income and paying it back out."

What Bressler and the District managed to accomplish was rare.

"This is only the third case in 25 years that I've been a trustee that all creditors have been paid off with interest," he said.

A New Start

In total, more than $3.5 million dollars was returned to more than 100 creditors. The final payment was made this fall, and on October 31, the US Bankruptcy Court in Fresno closed the case. But, Bressler, who is semi-retired, decided to stay with the District. After all these years, he said, AHD can finally resume providing health care services to the people living inside its boundaries. The possibility seems to excite him.

"There are a lot of things that happen," Bressler said. "They (AHD's board of directors) can benefit the people who are paying for the service, and there'll be no increase in taxes."

The first thing the board decided to do was buy the Dinuba Fire Department a $180,000 ambulance.

"I agreed to work with this board for the Alta Hospital District because of the things they're doing, like working with the fire department to get an ambulance," Bressler said. "With all the wear and tear, they just couldn't afford it. This is a great benefit to the people in the district."

Bressler described Fire Chief Chad Thompson's reaction to the board's decision this way - "He was like a little kid with a new toy." He wasn't far off.

"We were ecstatic," Thompson said of his department's reaction to the donation. But, the city's emergency personnel aren't quite ready to start playing. "I haven't even ordered it."

And, he cannot, not until the District transfers the funds. AHD and the city signed a donation agreement December 10. Once the money comes in, delivery of the new ambulance will take about 90 days, Thompson said. Then they can start to play, after one last slight delay.

"Adding decals will take about a week," Thompson said.

Ambulances Wear Down Quickly

The new vehicle is more than a toy, of course. It is a valuable addition to the city's fleet of ambulances, which spend a lot more time on the road since Alta District Hospital shut its doors. Patients are now sent far out of town, to Reedley, Visalia and Fresno.

"Our ambulances, they wear down quickly," said Thompson. "We put quite a bit of miles on our three ambulances each year. We try to replace ambulances after five years of service. We're not always able to do that."

That schedule of rotation means the city, which provides ambulance service to almost the entire AHD, is always saving for a new vehicle to replace one at or past its retirement date. Now, the funds it was about to spend can be rerouted.

"With this donation of the ambulance, it freed up money we were saving to buy a new ambulance," Thompson said. "All that money is going to new gurneys, heart monitors, defibrillators, CPR machines. Those are big-dollar items."

AHD Donations to Continue

The Dinuba Fire Department and other organizations that provide care to residents in the AHD, which includes unincorporated communities like Yettem, Cutler-Orosi, Sultana and Stone Corral, can expect to see more donations in the future, especially now that solvency has increased interest in serving on AHD's board.

"Before they (the District's creditors) got paid in full, it was hard to get people to work on the board," Bressler said. "Now that they're deciding what to do with the money, it's wonderful."

The AHD's board members include Chairperson Yvette Botello, Paulie Romero, Javier Quevedo, Martha Swain and Irene Atilano. Together, they will be deciding what to do with the District's income now that it has no expenses other than office costs and salaries for Bressler and the District's clerk. For the 2014-15 tax year, the District took in more than $380,000. They can expect similar income in the future, and their job now is deciding how it can best benefit the community.

"We have one or two ideas to help people in our district, not just a little group," said Botello. "It's going to be quite a challenge, actually."

Ideas Needed for Future Gifts

The board is looking for more ideas and wants citizen input. They have designed a survey for health-care providers and have been visiting doctors' offices. They're also accepting input directly from the public, which can mail them at P.O. Box 410, Orosi, 93647. In the meantime, they've got no firm plans yet, Botello said.

"There's a lot of things. Because it's so new, we have to look at people turning these surveys in," she said. "I think we have a good board on hand. They're diverse."

Buying an ambulance has emptied the District's coffers for now, so it will be a few months before they receive another disbursement from the Franchise Tax Board, but in the meantime the board will continue to meet, with its next session scheduled for 11:30am on Thursday January 14 at the Dinuba Library, 150 S. I St., when they will be discussing their budget for the upcoming year.

They will also be keeping up the search for new ideas.

"We're supposed to walk the streets, talking to the constituents and seeing what they need," Botello said. "Find out what they think is important."

VALLEY VOICE
Valley Scene
17 December, 2015

Ice Skating Rink Comes to Visalia

Allison Lambert

A perfect outing for friends, a family night or holiday party, the Enchanted Ice Garden celebrates its grand opening on Sunday, December 20th.

Located inside Garden Street Plaza in downtown Visalia, the Enchanted Ice Garden is one of the only ice skating rinks in the Central Valley, and is comprised of synthetic ice.

Open to guests of all ages, the Garden celebrates its grand opening at 12 pm with photos with Santa and holiday music going until 9:45pm.

The Enchanted Ice Garden will be open every day through January 3, including Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Hours of operation vary by day. Open skate admission is $10 per person, with a $3 skate rental, while special event nights have special ticket prices. Littlest skaters must be four years or older to venture onto the ice.

See the full Enchanted Ice Garden Schedule online at www.liveandplayvisalia.com. Tickets for the special events at the Enchanted Ice Garden can be pre-purchased at the City of Visalia Parks & Recreation Business Office, located inside the Anthony Community Center at 345 N. Jacob St. Ticket costs vary by event, but get your tickets soon, these event will sell out!

Special events at the rink include Frozen Nights on Monday, December 21 and Tuesday, December 22 from 6 – 9pm each night. These nights feature Princess Anna and Queen Elsa from the hit Disney film, "Frozen" as well as the movie being screened in view of the rink. Characters will be available for photos and will perform hit songs from the movie. Admission is $20 per person, adult admission is free with a child.

Family Night is Wednesday, December 23 from 6 – 9pm. Family Night features a screening of "A Christmas Story," admission is $5 per person.

The Enchanted Ice Garden will be open from December 20 to January 3.

Star Wars Night is Tuesday, December 29 from 6 – 9pm. Star Wars Night features a screening of the animated film, "Star Wars Attack of the Clones." Admission is $20 per person, adult admission is free with a child.

On Thursday, December 31 is the New Year's Eve Teen Night from 8 – 10 pm. Teen Night features music and food. Teens must be 13 – 18 years of age and have current school ID. Admission is $25 per teen.

The Enchanted Ice Garden is located on Main Street and Garden Street, in downtown Visalia.

Jacobob Marley (Jan Owens) warns Ol Eb Scrooge (Jim Kliegl) about the heavy chain that awaits him in the afterlife.

A Redneck Scrooge to be Staged at Lindsay Theater

Staff Reports

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The Enchanted Ice Garden is located on Main Street and Garden Street, in downtown Visalia.

Porterville Historical Museum Presents Model Train Show

Jan M. Krafve

The Porterville Historical Museum takes great pride in presenting the Annual Toy and Model Train and Show. Running now through January 9, 2016, visitors can see the largest model train exhibit in all of Tulare County.

This is the 32nd year that the museum has featured this spectacular display. With 22 different trains completely set up and running, it is a true delight for both children and adults. Walking into the exhibit room, the sound and sight of these toy trains will instantly engage the senses of yesteryear. Each model train is surrounded by towns with bridges, trees, and other fascinating miniature landscape images.

This year the show has doubled in size, with more than 180 feet of 0-gauge track alone. There are also HO, N and Z-gauge tracks, each running a uniquely-themed model train. Another addition to the exhibit is the G-gauge Garden Train which is designed to run outside. In addition, there is a tiny Nano Train, encased in glass dome. The longest train, winding around the top of the exhibit room, is a replica of the actual Napa Valley Train, still running today.

Many of the model trains are owned by the museum and others are on loan from people in the community. Dr. Don Stover has been in charge of setting up the exhibits this year. He has spent countless hours replacing broken or damaged track, so that each model train can run at its optimum level. Every piece displayed required intricate attention.

"There's no way I could have done this without the help of my eight special helpers," Stover said. "We spent many evenings cleaning and prepping each of these wonderful toys."

He gives thanks to the local service clubs and private citizens who donated necessary funds to continue the annual show. Funds are still needed and all donations are gratefully accepted.

Curator Sheila Pickerell is a wealth of knowledge about every artifact found within the museum. From antique farm equipment to ancient Yokut baskets, the museum is a local treasure trove of years gone by.

The Porterville Museum is located at 257 D. Street in Porterville and is open from 10am-4pm, Thursday through Saturday.

One of the 22 model train displays. Jan M. Krafve/Valley Voice

Education

Applications Now Being Accepted for Nursing at West Hills College Lemoore

Staff Reports

Applications are now being accepted for three nursing programs at West Hills College Lemoore: the Nurse Assistant (NATP) Training Program, Associate of Science Degree in Nursing Program (ADN), and the Licensed Vocational Nurse to Associate of Science Degree in Nursing Bridge Program (LVN-ADN).

The application period for the NATP ends on Tuesday, December 15 while the application for the ADN and LVN-ADN program closes on Tuesday, February 2. An information session for all of WHCL's health career programs will be held on Wednesday, December 9 from noon to 1pm in room 821 at WHCL.

"Health care is a growing field with an increasing demand for nurses in our area," said Kathryn DeFede, West Hills Community College District interim director of health careers. "If considering a career in health care, our programs are an excellent way to receive a certification, be able to be employed and use this certification and experience for advancement in health care."

The two-year ADN program qualifies students to take the RN NCLEX exam for licensure as a registered nurse. Students must be at least 18 and have completed all prerequisite courses with a GPA of 2.5 and with a grade of C or better in each course.

The LVN-ADN bridge program is a one-year program that qualifies students who already hold a vocational nursing license to take the RN NCLEX exam for licensure as a registered nurse. In addition to meeting the same requirements as for the ADN program, students must also hold a CPR card and have received a minimum score of 62% on the Assessment Technologies Institute of Essential Academic Skills test.

The NATP program prepares students to take the state certification exam to become a Certified Nursing Assistant during the course of 63 classroom hours and 135 hours of clinical experience and begins on Saturday, January 16. It runs until May 25 and is offered on Saturdays and Sundays. Students must enroll as a WHCL student, be at least 17, and go through a physical exam, TB test, drug test and criminal background check. They should also hold a CPR card.

DeFede added that the programs prepare students to go into a field that is in need of new employees.

"In the Central Valley, the health care industry is short 400 registered nurses each graduation year," she said.

For more information or an application packet for any of these programs, visit www.westhillscollege.com/lemoore/academics/health, or call the Health Careers Office, (559) 924-3490.

Dinuba High Wins Free Concert with Nashville Recording Artist While Feeding the Hungry

Staff Reports

KJUG COUNTRY, HITZ 104.9, 99.7 Classic Rock and My 97.5FM teamed up with FoodLink for another Community Food Drive now in its 10th year.

Dinuba High Leadership Students collected more than four tons of food.

Dinuba High School along with eight other high schools in Tulare County participated in this intense competition to bring in the most pounds of food to win an on-campus Free Concert with Nashville Recording Artist, Kelsea Ballerini, plus a lunch time hook up with HITZ 104.9. Past artists have included Taylor Swift, Hunter Hayes and Canaan Smith.

The competition ran during November. Students collected non-perishable food items and FoodLink picked up the product, weighed and kept the tallies. Momentum Broadcasting brought in 10,038 lbs., the participating high schools brought in collectively 17,054 lbs., plus some elementary schools in Tulare County participated totaling more 27,863 lbs. of food. The food will be distributed to those most in need in Tulare County.

Dinuba High leadership students collected more than four tons of food (8,403 lbs.) that went to their local shelter, Open Gate. Dinuba High School students and staff had fun challenges each week for the canned food drive. Each day students wowed with how many cans they brought in. Open Gate was incredibly thankful and said they now have no worries of feeding the hungry this holiday season because of our canned food drive.

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Education

Porterville College's 2015 Psych Tech Program graduates. Courtesy/Porterville College

Porterville College Psych Tech Program Holds Graduation Ceremony

Staff Reports

Porterville College would like to congratulate the Psychiatric Technology Class of 2015 on their Dec graduation. The pinning ceremony took place in a packed gymnasium where family and friends crowded in to cheer on their graduates.

During the pinning ceremony special awards were given to Desiree Pedraza for Outstanding Clinical Performance and to Vanessa Pulido for Scholastic Achievement. The keynote speaker was Elizabeth Keele, RN, BSN. Class speakers were Alisha Johnson and Katy Ortega.

Congratulations to the Porterville College Psychiatric Technology Class of 2015: Robin Alvarado, Brenda Amigon, Alejandra Contreras, Ricardo Covarrubias, Jessica Enriquez, Raul Fajardo, Jennifer Hill, Alisha Johnson, Alexandra Madrigal, Guadalupe Munoz, Katy Ortega, Desiree Pedraza, Vanessa Pulido, Adrianna Rivas, Cynthia Sanchez, Lacey Sanchez, Cartay Taylor, Veronica Urtiz, Kimberly Willingham, Rachelle Workman and Esmeralda Zavala.

The Porterville College Psychiatric Technology program is a three-semester (18 month) certificate program. The program is comprised of the study and proper care of the developmentally disabled and the mentally ill while incorporating basic nursing skills.

The program includes classes on the college campus and clinical training at Porterville Developmental Center, local mental health hospitals and other approved facilities. The Psychiatric Technician graduate will be able to provide safe client care by determining appropriate nursing interventions to clients with psychiatric disorders and/or developmental disabilities. The care provided is characterized by consistent critical thinking and problem solving skills, clinical competence within the scope of practice, accountability, effective communication skills, respect for diverse cultures, a commitment to caring and client education.

The program is the result of dedication from not only Porterville College faculty and staff, but community partnerships as well. PC would like to extend a special thanks to the Kern Community College District, the Porterville College Child Development Center, Sierra View Medical Center, Porterville Sheltered Workshop, Lilian B. Hill Learning Center, The Hamilton House, Tulare County Mental Health, Porterville Developmental Center, New Life Residential Care Facility, Crestwood Psychiatric Health and Atascadero State Hospital.

PC Psychiatric Technology faculty include: Tim Boone, Manuela Haberkorn, Margarette Huddleston, Elizabeth Keele, Christopher Roche, Danny Sciacqua, Beverly Ward and Gayle Willis.

The next available Psychiatric Technology program will start August, 2017; the deadline for filing an application is February 28, 2017. The application period for the Spring, 2016 cohort has already passed. For more information or a list of prerequisites, call the Health Careers office at (559) 791-2321 or visit www.portervillecollege.edu/health-ca-

Woodlake FFA Canned Food Scavenger Hunt & Turkey Shoot Fundraiser

Kiara Benavides

On December 2, Woodlake FFA hosted their chapter's annual Canned Food Scavenger Hunt meeting. All FFA members were invited to spread holiday cheer that evening as they helped collect cans and boxed goods throughout the neighborhoods and community.

Our chapter did succeed in collecting more than 500 canned and boxed food items. All donations were later donated to the Woodlake Food Pantry. Members had a wonderful experience spreading spirit throughout the community as they received generous donations and kind words of support and encouragement. In the end, as quoted by a Woodlake FFA supporter, "the Canned Food Scavenger Hunt taught our members the feeling of giving back during this Christmas season."

Turkey Shoot

On December 5, the Woodlake FFA Alumni Boosters hosted their annual Turkey Shoot Fundraiser which took place at the Woodlake Lions Rodeo Grounds. The community was invited to participate in the Boosters Club sponsored fundraiser which consisted of competing in sport shooting of clay pigeons in order to win a turkey.

All funds were donated to the chapter to help award FFA members with scholarships for college and various conferences, lodging and travel throughout the state for career development events, and to help host activities at the chapter level. It was very pleasing to see the community get involved with this yearly tradition and to see them help support the Woodlake FFA Chapter.

It was also admirable to see FFA members get involved with the running of the event and obtain certain experiences that will hopefully follow them throughout their future endeavors. Overall, the Turkey Shoot Fundraiser was a success and members, alumni, and the community had an enjoyable time running and participating in the yearly fundraiser.

FFA Reporter Kiara Benavides is a Woodlake High student.

A previous Woodlake Turkey Shoot. Courtesy/Woodlake FFA

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Calendar

Mondays: Bridge Club, 9:30am-2pm
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291. Admission is free. For additional information call: Joan Dinwiddie @ 732-0855

Mondays: Knitters, 10am-12:30pm
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291. Everyone's welcome.

Fridays: Women's Morning Bible Study, 9am-Noon
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291. For additional information call: 739-9010

1st and 3rd Thursdays: Central Valley Tea Party Meetings, 6pm
819 West Visalia Road,Farmersville.

Through January 3: "Hidden in the Leaves" Arts Exhibition
The Arts Alliance of Three Rivers is excited to present "Hidden in the Leaves" arts exhibition. Uncover autumn's abundance of artistry and imagination at our 2015-2016 Fall-Winter art show. Opening on November 3rd thru January 3rd at 41717 Sierra Drive Three Rivers. Open daily (except Monday) 10am to 5pm. Artist receptions will be held on 1st Saturday, November 7, December 5 and January 2 from 11am to 2:30pm. Sponsors include Arts Alliance of Three Rivers, Sierra Subs and Salads and 1st Saturday of Three Rivers. For additional information call 559 967-8281.

DECEMBER

Through January 9: Annual Toy and Model Train Show
The Porterville Historical Museum will host the Annual Toy and Model Train Show. This is the 32nd year that the museum has featured the display. The museum is located at 257 D. Street in Porterville, open from 10am-4pm, Thursday through Saturday.

December 18: P.A.T.Y. Studio Presents "Christmas Begins With Christ", 6:00pm
Doors open at 5:30pm. Tickets on sale now at P.A.T.Y Studio,206 N. White St, Hanford, Calif; for more information, dial 559-410-8487. $10/person or $8 pre-sale. Ages 5 and under free.

December 18-20: Redneck Christmas Carol at the Lindsay Community Theater
Friday and Saturday night shows are at 7:30pm. The Sunday matinee is at 2pm. There will also be a visit from Santa Claus during intermission. The Lindsay Community Theater is located at 190 N. Elm St. in Lindsay. Admission is $10 for adults and $5 for students. The show is directed by George Pearce. Tickets may be purchased at lindsaycommunitytheater.com, or at the door the day of the performance.

December 18: Holiday Cooking Class at Porterville College, 9am-noon
Overcome the stress of preparing holiday meals by taking a three-hour class at Porterville College. Let PC Chef Pierce Thomas teach you how to prepare a stress-free meal that everyone is sure to love. Class takes place from 9 am-noon Friday, December 18 in the Student Center Cafeteria. Learn to prepare baked apples, apple strudel, crème brulee, and more. Cost is $35. This class is open to the public. Prior registration is required.

December 18: Annual Ugly Christmas Sweater Party, 7pm
At Farmer's Fury Winery, 358 West D Street in Lemoore. Michael Keeney appears 8-10pm.

December 18 & 19: An Old Fashioned Christmas At The Zalud House, 6-8pm
The Zalud House Museum will host its annual "Old Fashioned Christmas" Candlelight Tours on December 11, 12, 18 and 19 from 6:00-8:00 PM. The Zalud House will come alive with the holiday spirit by featuring special seasonal displays, vintage decorations and yuletide piano music. The guided tours and refreshments are sure to provide an enjoyable evening for the whole family. Admission is only $2 for adults and $0.50 for children. The museum is located at 393 North Hockett Street.Built in 1891, the Zalud House is one of few museums in the nation that is furnished entirely with the original owners' possessions. It is listed in the National Historical Registry of Old Houses and in the National Register of Historic Places. For more information on the Candlelight Tours or the Zalud House Museum call (559) 791-7695 or visit the City of Porterville website at www.ci.porterville.ca.us.

December 19: Canned Food Drive, 8am-1pm
The Meet the Need Canned Food Drive will be held at Cost Less Foods in Corcoran.

December 19-22: Beginning Horse Camp, 1-3:30pm each day
At Wood N Horse Training Stables, 42846 North Fork Dr, Three Rivers, CA 93271. Topics will cover history, safety, feeding, medical care, grooming, how to put a saddle on and riding each day plus lots more! Ages are 7 – 77! For more info please call 559-561-4268. Instructor is World Champion trainer, exhibitor and horse show judge, and author, Christy Wood.

December 20-January 3: Enchanted Ice Garden
Open to guests of all ages, the Garden celebrates its grand opening at 12 pm on December 20 with photos with Santa and holiday music going until 9:45 pm. Hours vary by day, but the Enchanted Ice Garden will be open Christmas Eve/Day and New Year's Eve/Day. Open skate admission is $10 per person, with a $3 skate rental, while special event nights have differing prices. Little skaters must be at least four years old to venture onto the ice. For more information, see liveandplayvisalia.com

December 21: Christmas Centerpiece Class, 6-8pm
What Christmas table setting would be complete without a fresh floral centerpiece? This traditional holiday centerpiece includes long-lasting Christmas greenery and flowers, along with two taper candles. Cost is $50, paid at sign-up; location is 246 Heinlen St, Lemoore.

December 22: Opening the College Door, 9am-2pm
Porterville College is inviting the public to participate in "Opening the College Door: A College Transition Workshop" Saturday, December 5 at Porterville College. This FREE conference will provide information and resources about community college and support services for students with learning and other disabilities. Presentations will focus on using technology to improve executive functioning, increasing campus social connections, the importance of self-advocacy, and planning the transition from high school to college. Registration will be at www.portervillecollege.edu. Porterville

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College is located at 100 East College Avenue in Porterville. For more information call (559) 791-2200 or visit www.portervillecollege.edu.

December 24: Christmas Eve Services at First Presbyterian Church of Visalia, 7pm and 11pm
The public is invited to attend two traditional Christmas Eve services at First Presbyterian Church of Visalia. The candlelight services will be held on December 24 at 7 and 11 p.m. in the church sanctuary at 215 N. Locust St. in Visalia. Attendees at the 7 p.m. services will worship with favorite traditional carols featuring a brass ensemble led by renowned trumpet player Cooper Walden, the chancel choir, women's ensemble, and handbells.

The service will end in the twinkle-lit courtyard by candlelight with a chorus of Silent Night. The 11 p.m. service will be a contemplative worship experience featuring brass led by Walden and soprano soloist Heather Krane.

December 31: Exeter's New Year's Eve Doo-Dah Parade and Free Fireworks Show, 6pm
Exeter's New Year's Eve Celebration and Doo-Dah Parade is Thursday, December 31st.

The celebration starts off at 6pm with the Doo-Dah Parade on Pine Street followed by a FREE fireworks show at 9 pm provided by the Exeter Lion's Club.

There will be entertainment, bounce house, petting zoo, face painting, train rides, food vendors, live band, dancing and a beer garden.

For sponsorships and donations, call Bob Sperry at (559) 679-8906. Parade entry forms can be picked up at NSE Insurance, 160 South D Street in Exeter. For more information, call (559) 592-9411.

JANUARY

January 1: Bank of the Sierra's Rockin' Resolution Run, 7:30am
Bank of the Sierra is pleased to announce its continued partnership with the Visalia Rescue Mission to help enhance the quality of life for Central Valley citizens in need. Runners and walkers are welcome for a 5k through Downtown Visalia. A 1 mile Kids Race will kick-off the festivities.Local bands will perform along the course to keep you motivated! Show up in costume -- the top three favorites will win a prize!Start the New Year off on the right foot... get fit & support our local community!

January 8: Amy Shuklian Comedy Fundraiser Night, 6pm
Amy Shuklian will perform the opening act for well-known comedian Darren Carter. The community will have the opportunity to support Amy's campaign while enjoying a fun-filled evening of comedy at the Main Street Theatre in Visalia. VIP tickets are $50 and General Admission tickets are $30. GA tickets will be available at the door at an increased price. Tickets available at amyforsupervisor.com and brown-tickets.com

January 8: Central Valley Parkinson's Support Group Meeting, 10:30am
In the Pre School Center of Visalia United Methodist Church located at 5200 West Caldwell, Visalia. Program - Video on Parkinson's.Plan to join us for lunch and good conversation after the meeting: www.cvpsg.net or cvparkinsons@gmail.com or 559-563-0725.

January 13: Way Back Wednesdays--Classic Flicks at the Fox, 7pm
On the second Wednesday monthly through April, 2016, the Visalia Fox Theatre presents a classic film. Admission is $5 and includes a small popcorn. Tonight: Bringing Up Baby, 1938.

January 19-May 12: Exercise for the Community
For those looking for all the perks of a gym without the sign-up fees, Porterville College is offering Exercise for the Community Monday through Thursdays from 7-8 am or 8-9 am in the PC Fitness Center starting January 19 through May 12. Cost is $80 per person. This class is open to the public. Prior registration is required.

January 21: State Notary Class, 9am-noon
A commissioned notary is qualified to take a three hour refresher course, offered at Porterville College in SM-125. Notaries being re-commissioned may arrive at 8am and sit in on the entire course. The standard class takes place from 8am-5pm. Cost is $70 plus exam fee; prior registration required. For the exam, please bring a $40 check or money order to class made payable to "Secretary of State."

January 23: Lindsay Chamber of Commerce Casino Night, 5:30pm
The Lindsay Chamber of Commerce would like to invite you to CASINO NIGHT! The 104th Annual Awards will be honoring Lindsay community members and businesses that have made significant contributions. The winners will be honored at the Chamber Awards Dinner on Saturday, January 23, 2016 at 5:30 p.m. The awards dinner will take place at McDermont Field House and Sports Center in Lindsay. Everyone is welcome. If you have any questions or would like to reserve your tickets, please contact me at 559-562-4929.

January 25-April 11: Zumba at Porterville College
For those looking to lose weight while having fun, try Zumba, a Latin-dance based fitness phenomenon that has been sweeping the nation. The class combines intervals of fast and slow rhythms with low-impact, high-energy dance moves. Each dance has a repetitive set of moves that are easy to follow so everyone can do them. Class starts Monday, Jan. 25 and runs through April 11, every Monday and Wednesday from 6-7 pm in the Student Center Conference Room. Cost is $60. This class is open to the public. Prior registration is required.

January 28: 5th Annual LocalMotion Awards Luncheon, 11:30am
This event is dedicated to honoring the projects, citizens, public officials and plans that have contributed to transportation planning in Tulare County. Deadline for Nominations is Friday, December 31, 2015 by midnight. To sponsor the conference, please go to http://2016localmotionwaards.eventbrite.com. If you have any questions, call 559-623-0450 or email ABlythe@TulareCOG.org, CC: DAlvez@TulareCOG.org

Send your calendar items to: editor@ourvalleyvoice.com

Sports

COS Lady Giants Seek To Build On Prior Success

Stefan Barros

The 2015-16 version of College of the Sequoias Women's Basketball team returns with just one player from its 2014-15 team that went 29-4 and saw multiple players leave with scholarships to four-year universities. Head Coach Ray Alvarado wants his new group of players to continue the momentum that his program has had going.

Alvarado's team currently stands at 6-5.

"We're pretty much all new this year, I want them to keep with what we've been doing," he said. "I want them to be ready to meet the challenges the program has set over the past couple of years. I don't need them to put too much pressure on themselves though."

With some of his players injured, Alvarado believes that as the season goes along, the players should be able to meet those challenges he mentioned.

"We'll be ready and prepared when conference starts," he said. "We have a lot of injuries and sickness right now and we haven't had a full team all season. By the time league play starts, we should have everything ready with our players and we should be on the same page."

Alvarado has asked some of his new players to become leaders while having little experience on his team, but there are others who can are also step into a leadership role, "We do have two redshirts from last year, and they have been leaders for us. Another player who's been a leader is Leigha Moland, but she's been out with injury as well."

The one returner for the Lady Giants is Monache High School graduate Alexandria Tobie.

"I've tried to take a leadership position," she said. "Everyone is new and I'm getting to know the players. On the court I try to help them get everything down and try to tell them how things are done."

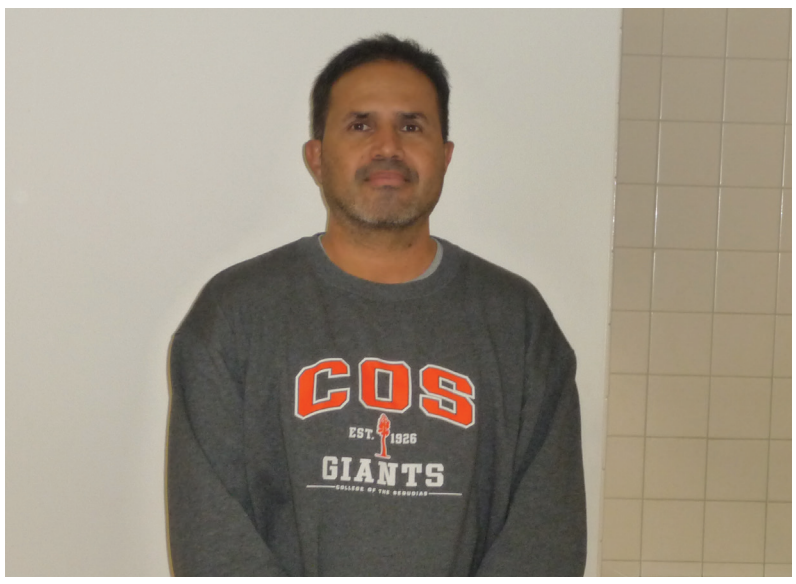
Tobie went on talk about how the team is coming along now that the season is 11 games in, "We're slowly getting there as a team, but we have inexperienced guards. This team though is a total opposite of last year's team. This team is a little more willing on defense, and last year we were more offensive minded."

Alvarado had similar things to say about his defense, when he compared this team to last year's team.

"Defensively we've done pretty well," he said. "Offensively we haven't been as strong, our guard play has been off. If you don't have good guard play, it becomes tough to win. Injuries have also caught up with us a little bit and has been one of the reasons for our offensive struggles."

With such a new team, Alvarado has had to look to some younger more inexperienced players, but there are two players who will come back here in the next few weeks leading up to conference play.

"Alijiah Turner and Alyssa Gonzalez are a couple of freshmen that will be coming back from injury around the time we start conference play, he said. "That should definitely help. All the new players work hard though, they just have to adjust to the college game."


College of the Sequoias Women's Basketball Head Coach Ray Alvarado. Stefan Barros/Valley Voice

Alvarado talked some more about some things that his team needs to work in order to improve on while they get ready for conference play in January.

"Our liability right now is our inexperience in our guard play," he said. "We're putting pressure on the kids to perform, but they're coming along slowly."

Having only played 11 games, Alvarado is trying to find the identity of his team, but if his team is going to successful they'll need to be working on defense.

"We've always been good defensively," he said. "Right now we're just trying to get them confidence and experience. The two usually go hand in hand, so we want to give them that experience. They just need to continue to work. If they do that, they can execute on both ends of the floor."

The Lady Giants will play their next set of games in the Antelope Valley College Tournament in Lancaster. They will first play Barstow College on Friday, December 18 at 5pm. They will play their next home game when they open up Central Valley Conference play vs. Taft College on Saturday, January 9 at 5pm.

West Hills College Coalinga Falcons Earn Honors

It's the end of the football season for community colleges and with the season's end comes the Golden Coast League post-season awards. The West Hills College Coalinga Falcons, who recently finished out their season with an overall 9-2 record, an undefeated 6-0 in conference record, and as the League champions earned several awards for players and staff. The nominees were chosen by the league's head coaches.

"It is great to see that so many of our Falcons have been awarded All-Conference honors this year," said Cam Olson, Head Coach. "I greatly appreciate that all of the head coaches from around the Golden Coast League made the choice to vote for our guys and to recognize us in this way."

Coach Cam Olson was named the League Coach of the Year while Caleb Wilson, a linebacker, was named the Defensive Player of the Year. Several players, including Wilson, were named to the All-Conference team: Defensive End Ualesi "Wes" Sale; Defensive Back Mason Kualii Moe; Wide Receiver Dandre Fuller; Running Back D'Anthony Cross; Offensive Lineman Kameron Gomness; Linebacker Michael Taliulu; Defensive Back Shavon Prince; Defensive End Tashad Charity; and Punter James Hague.

Additionally, some players received honorable mentions: Defensive Line Tyrone Smith; Wide Receiver Ryan Fila; Tight End Ryan Hardin; Defensive End Damian Horton; and Defensive Back Gregory Haywood.

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Health

11 Participants Graduate from Stanford University's Patient Education Program Facilitator Training

Staff Reports

First graduating class of "Stanford-trained" Empowerment for Better Living (EBL) facilitators in Tulare County.
Names from left to right: Front Row: Alma Torres-Nguyen, Irma Gallegos, Jessica Uriarte, Candy Silva, Ellen Woods, Emma Camarena, Cynthia Allen, Lupe Ramirez, Back Row: Janet Delgado, Wendy Martinez, Alana Unger, Reberka Foster, Bill Robinson, and Ryan Gates Courtesy/Kaweah Delta.

Eleven Tulare County residents graduated this past November as facilitators from a prominent program for chronic disease self-management developed by Stanford University. The facilitators completed a 32-hour comprehensive training course that prepares them to empower members of the local community living with chronic illness with self-management skills. Stanford's Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) will be offered locally as Empowerment for Better Living (EBL).

These graduates are now the first group of "Stanford-trained" EBL facilitators for our community.The program will continue to be an integral component of the services offered at Kaweah Delta's new Chronic Disease Management Center (CDMC)in Visalia, part of Kaweah Delta's Population Health Initiative to improve the health of the community.Four of the graduates of the facilitator training are staff members atCDMC. The remaining graduates are individuals interested in implementing the EBL program in various community sites and churches throughout the county. All facilitators either have a chronic health condition or take care of a family member with a chronic health condition.

The facilitators trainees were trained to help others learn about self-managing chronic conditions and living a healthy life. The group was co-led by Alma Torres-Nguyen and Janet Delgado, who serve as Master-Trainers for Stanford's CDSMP. Torres-Nguyen and Delgado strongly support improving the health of our communityby encouraging self-management, ownership of one's own health, and collaboration with healthcare providers.

Kaweah Delta's EBL program invites 12-18 participants to meet as a group once a week for a total of six weeks, and each session lasts two and a half hours. The EBL program has served Tulare County community members for nearly one year; and has been held in the Visalia Public Library, the Good Samaritan Center, and St. Mary's Church. The EBL participants learn practical tools they can use to manage their symptoms and to take charge of their health.

"Developing and using a weekly action-plan is a fantastic way to change your own behavior. You get help to develop an actionable plan; and learn to become accountable to yourself and to others who support your choices," said Delgado. "Participants set goal such as walking more, sleeping earlier, and then return to the class each week to discuss how they succeededand are making positive changes in their life."

Subjects covered in the workshops include techniques to deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, pain, and isolation. Additionally, the participants learn about exercises for maintaining and improving strength, flexibility and endurance. Furthermore, the course reviews challenges people face including appropriate use of medications, how to evaluate new treatments, nutrition, and decision-making. A key element of the class includes communicating effectively with family, friends, and health professionals.

"Often people dealing with a chronic health condition do not want to burden others and do not ask for the help and support they need from family and friends. The EBL program helps by practicing open communication and using 'I' messages," said Torres-Nguyen. "Examples include, 'I feel unhappy when…,' 'I don't like when…,''I appreciate when you help me…,' 'I like it when…'Promoting healthy communication between caregivers and the chronically ill helps them to be supportof each other."

"Empowering and engaging each person to be an active participant in their health must be central to what we do and who we are if we are going to improve the health of our communities; and the EBL program does just that," said Ryan Gates, director of population health management at the Chronic Disease Management Clinic for Kaweah Delta Health Care District. "Our mission will be focused on participants' continuous use and engagement of the program and hope that years later they willcontinue to usethe action plans to improve the quality of their lives and health."

EBL is designed to enhance regular treatment and disease-specific programs such as Better Breathers, cardiac rehabilitation, or diabetes instruction. In addition, many people have more than one chronic condition.

The program is especially helpful for these people, as it gives them the tools to coordinate skills to manage their health, as well as to help them stay active and joyful in their lives.

There will be future opportunities to be trained as facilitators for the EBL and Tomando Control de su Salud (Spanish version).

To learn more about managing your chronic disease, caring for yourself while caring for those with chronic disease and/or being trained as a facilitator, call 559-624-2416. The EBL workshops are free and offered quarterly. Learn more at www.kaweahdelta.org/livebetter.

Family Healthcare Network Opens New School-Based Health Center in Traver

Staff Reports

After nearly two years of planning and development, Family HealthCare Network (FHCN) will open the doors of its newest Community Health Center in the rural community of Traver on December 9.

Located on a parcel of Traver Elementary School land at 4177 Avenue 368, FHCN's newest site will be a school-based health center and was developed in conjunction with Traver Joint School District.The new Traver Health Center will offer comprehensive family medicine and pediatric services for local school children, families, and the community.

"This project is years in the making and with the support of our partners, patients and the community, we are extremely pleased to officially begin expanding access to health care for Traver residents, and to be a part of the ongoing development of this community," stated FHCN President and CEO Kerry Hydash.

In early August, FHCN was notified that it was selected as a recipient of a New Access Point grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)to open the new site. The 3,700 square-foot health center features six exam rooms for medical services and supports the organization's team-based, patient-centered medical home model. The Traver Health Centerwill mark the organization's 20th site, and 16th Community Health Center in Tulare and Kings counties.

FHCN's Traver Health Center initially opened part-time, Monday and Friday from 9am - 1pm, and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 2pm to 6pm. Full time hours will expand to Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm. To schedule an appointment, or for more information about, call 1-877-960-3426, or visit the website at www.FHCN.org.

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Bank of the Sierra Run Funds Local Non-Profit; Inspires Fitness for New Year

Staff Reports

Bank of the Sierra announced that registration was still open for its annual run for charity, the Rockin' Resolution Run. The New Year's Day run aims to inspire community members to make fitness goals for the New Year, while also creating community awareness. In its fourth year, the run has raised more than $25,000 for local charities.

Over the past two years, the local run has partnered with Visalia Rescue Mission, a local homeless outreach organizationwhich serves the community through offering food and shelter and other programs for men, women and children in need. The group serves an average of 130 people each night. All net proceeds from this year's run will go to the Mission.

The rock-themed 5k event hosts several bands along the run route. This year also sees the addition of a costume contest, which will encourage runners to don their best rock get-up from any era. Prizes will be given for best individual and group costumes.

Bank of the Sierra President and CEO Kevin McPhaill expressed his appreciation for the work that the Visalia Rescue Mission does. "It's a pleasure to be able to partner with the Visalia Rescue Mission. The Bank loves to support organizations that improve our community, and we're happy to show our gratitude for the Rescue Mission's important work."

The festivities start out with a 1-mile kids run at 9am at the Downtown Visalia Bank of the Sierra branch. Early-Bird Registration is open through December 11th at a discount, and registrations will be accepted through the 24th, with limited registration available the morning of the event. Learn more at http://rockinresolutionrun.com, and register online at http://goo.gl/oxXRqI

Participants from the 2015 Rockin' Resolution Run. Courtesy/Bank of the Sierra

Amy Shulkian to Host & Perform Opening Act for Comedy Night Fundraiser

Staff Reports

Come next June, Visalia City Councilwoman Amy Shuklian and her supporters are looking forward to her taking center stage as Tulare County Supervisor.

But on January 8, the community can see her in a different kind of limelight as she hosts and performs the opening act for well-known comedian, Darren Carter.

The Comedy Fundraiser Night will give the community the opportunity to support Amy's campaign while enjoying a fun-filled evening of comedy at the Main Street Theatre in Visalia.

Beginning at 6pm, there will be a VIP meet-and-greet so guests can interact with Amy and Darren before the show.

Beer, wine, and refreshments will be served. Following the VIP event, doors will open at 7pm and the main event will begin at 8pm.

"Darren and I started our comedy careers in Fresno together and since then he has really made a big impression in the business and I'm excited for him to be a part of this fundraising night," said Amy.

"I can't wait to give guests the opportunity to enjoy a great show and to share my love of comedy."

Darren Carter is known to take the stage and his audience with him and has received recognition from Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Comedy Central BET and Showtime, to name a few.

For more information about the main entertainment, visit darrencarter.com.

VIP tickets are $50 and General Admission is $30. General Admission tickets will be available at the door, but prices will increase.

Tickets are available at amyforsupervisor.com and browntickets.com.

Amy Shuklian

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